

**Seizing the moment of opportunity?**  
**Emerging movements of Coptic activists in Egypt**

**Lars Gunnar Christiansen**



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**Department of Comparative Politics**

**University of Bergen**



## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to explain the development of a Coptic secular movement in Egypt. By using social movement literature I produce a conceptual framework that emphasizes the three variables of opportunity structures, mobilizing structures and framing. I review the literature about the Coptic community and contentious politics in Egypt to supply my variables with context-sensitive indicators.

The case of the Coptic community is situated as a case in a universe of similar communal groups in the Middle East, where the Coptic case is typical in terms of its size in relation to the majority, and the level of collective action. The Coptic secular movement is a recent phenomenon, and is thereby understudied. To my knowledge, this is the first contribution that analyzes Coptic collective action after 2011 with concepts from social movement theory.

To sufficiently account for the Coptic secular movement I analyze how it has developed in recent history, revealing that the Copts have gone from relative isolation to be visible collective actors in the post-2011 context. The thesis relies on data from peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and other academic publications that discusses the recent history of Egypt and the Coptic community. It also benefits from interviews with Egyptian Coptic activists, politicians, and scholars to shed light on the more recent developments.

The analysis of historical and current Coptic collective action reveals a complex pattern of empirical relationships. The dominant role of the Church in political, social, and spiritual spheres of life is found to inhibit Coptic collective action. This role has historically been enforced by a patron-client relationship between the Church leadership and Egyptian regime. This elite alignment discouraged collective action directed both against the Church and the regime. The inclusion of the Coptic upper class in the patron-client network of the Egyptian regime also prohibited resources to flow downwards to potential grass root mobilizers. With the gradual decline of the church-regime alliance and the persistence of Coptic grievances, collective action became a viable option in the 2000s. With the complete reshuffle of Egyptian politics in 2011, the secular Coptic movement eventually found its place in the national opposition against the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi.

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“Scholars cannot continue to view Coptic Christians as passive victims of state discrimination or Islamist violence” (Sedra, 2009: 1056-1057)

## **1. Introduction**

On 21 June 2001 Copts for the first time since 1972 rallied on the streets of Cairo. Thousands of Copts gathered to protest against the unfair treatment of the Coptic community in the Egyptian Press. They used religious symbols, and defended the honor of their Church, which had been scandalized by the newspaper *al-Nabaa Weekly* (Elsässer, 2011: 240-241; Soliman, 2009: 143-144). In contrast, on 27 November 2012, Copts gathered alongside Muslims in Shubra, a mixed religious neighborhood in Cairo. At the forefront of the demonstration stood the Maspero Youth Union, a Coptic social movement organization, coalescing with secular parties and organizations in an expression of discontent with the drafted constitution. Together they marched on Tahrir, the geographic center of the Egyptian revolution (Shalaby, 2012; Informant 3, 2012a).

A few things had changed from 2001 to 2012 (see Iskander, 2012; Sedra, 2012). Religious symbolism was no longer present, the protestors were not only Christians, and the grievances that were fronted were no longer particular to the Church or Copts. In recent works it has been emphasized that political divisions within the Egyptian Coptic community are changing (Iskander, 2012; Elsässer, 2011; Bland, 2012; Sika, 2012; Soliman, 2009). Young Copts are actively engaging in politics outside the traditional channel of political influence, i.e. the church patriarchy. While most Copts previously approved of the Church’s exercise of political influence, political activists of today are expressing political positions regardless of the political views of the Coptic Pope and patriarchs. They address Coptic issues as national issues, not as sectarian grievances in particular (Soliman, 2009; Iskander, 2012). At the peak of this development is the founding of new activist organizations (Tadros, 2011). A number of recent case-studies have analyzed the roles of women’s rights organizations (Rizzo, Price and Meyer, 2012), soccer fan clubs (Dorsey, 2012) and workers’ movements (Bishara, 2012) during and after the 2011 uprising. What is lacking, however, is study that thoroughly analyzes the development of the Coptic movement.

Egyptian Christians and their political engagements have too often been analyzed in the pretext of their status as *dhimmi*s (Ye'or, 1997), or the internal dynamics of the Church and the community in a historical perspective (see Sedra, 2009). To understand their role in a changed Egypt after 2011, there is need to analyze external, internal, and historical factors that shed light

on their role as political actors. The new organizations of youths have adopted goals of a secular state, and political participation of Copts through democratic politics (Sika, 2012: 77-78; Iskander, 2012: 179; Informant 14, 2013; Informant 13, 2013; Informant 3, 2012a). As such, these new Coptic youth organizations will be analyzed as social movement organizations, hereby termed *the secular Coptic movement*, with historical roots that predate the recent regime change in Egypt. The thesis asks the following research question: *What explains the development of a secular Coptic movement from 1981 to 2012?*

Social movement theory (SMT) provides the thesis with a theoretical framework, which is applied on secondary and primary sources. By doing so, I seek to identify the most important factors that influence the dependent variable, movement development. ‘Movement’ does not here refer to a fully-fledged social movement, but to what is called *contentious collective action* in the social movement literature (Tarrow, 2011). The aim of this thesis is thereby to investigate how and why the Coptic community has developed a type of collective action. This will be done by a conducting a case study of current and historical Coptic collective action.

By using a historically oriented approach, I argue that the secular Coptic movement is not a recent phenomenon. The Secular Coptic movement rose as a response to the continuous neglect of minority rights in Egypt, and because of a realization that a secular framing is the best way to promote minority rights under today’s political context. In order to demonstrate this argument, I partition recent Egyptian history into three time periods, where the first saw no Coptic collection at all, the second saw confessionally framed collective action, and a third that saw the introduction of a secular framing and organized groups.

The study contributes to the theoretical literature about social movements by exploring a new empirical context with such theory. Scholars are already analyzing contentious Middle East politics by using “the tools that social science has developed for the rest of the world” (Beinin and Vairel, 2011: 2). This thesis subscribes to this notion as well, and wants to understand the region by using standard social science categories. Islamic activist movements has until now been the most popular regional type of contentious politics to explore through the lens of SMT (Wiktorowicz, 2003). A social movement approach to the Egyptian Christian community is missing. The following section will specify the theoretical contribution.



## **1.1 Contentious collective action and theoretical contribution**

Ordinary people sometimes use contentious means to challenge elites, authorities and other opponents. This phenomenon can be defined as “contentious collective action”:

“Collective action becomes contentious when it is used by people who lack regular access to representative institutions, who act in the name of new or unaccepted claims, and who behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others or authorities” (Tarrow, 2011: 7).<sup>1</sup>

This definition captures the characteristics of the case across time. Over time the degree of organization, the extent of collective action, and coherence of the collective actors’ perceptions increases. I refer to this process as “movement development”. To explain movement development the thesis use a conceptual framework based on Political Process Theory (PPT) (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996), which supplies the thesis with three main variables; opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, and framing.<sup>2</sup>

The theoretical contribution of this thesis is thereby to add observations of Coptic collective action to the social movement literature. While there has been many detailed accounts of “the Coptic question” (defined below), none has yet situated the Coptic minority in the landscape of Egyptian social movements.<sup>3</sup> The thesis strengthens the argument that dynamics of contentious politics occur in arenas that does not always involve the state, but may challenge authorities in other institutions in society, such as the Coptic Church (Kniss and Burns, 2004). It also contributes to the increasing literature about contentious politics in the Middle East, specifically among minority groups.

## **1.2 Scope of the study**

The thesis will focus on the development of Coptic collective action in Egypt in the timeframe 1981 to 2012. To explain the appearance of new Coptic collective action in 2001, it is required to look into the time-period that preceded these events. Likewise, the period prior to 2011 is investigated to understand the preconditions for the changes that happened to Coptic collective actors just before and after the Egyptian uprising on 25 January. Finally, the time that has passed

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of variation, I use the terms “collective action” and “contentious action” interchangeably as abbreviations for this phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup> I follow Goodwin and Jasper (1999:28) and Kriesi’s terminology (2004:69-79) in terming this tripartite structure “political process theory”.

<sup>3</sup> See Soliman (2009) for an early attempt, with a grievance-theoretical focus. Sika (2012) is a later contribution, but looks at mixed-sectarian “new social movements”, and both Islamic and Coptic religious discourse.

since the uprising has seen rapid change, and needs to be observed to recognize the workings of contemporary influential factors.

To understand the development of the “secular Coptic movement”, the thesis will on the one hand account for the development of Coptic movement, and on the other hand for the secular turn of this movement.

Focusing on the Coptic movement means that I will limit the study to look at the developments that concern the Copts specifically. As such, I will not analyze the general Egyptian opposition organizations that were central in the 2011 uprising, such as “Kifaya” and the “26<sup>th</sup> April Youth Movement”. These organizations are assumed to have a lot of Coptic members (Sika, 2012), but they do not front specific Coptic grievances in the same manner as for example Maspero Youth Union (MYU) (Sedra, 2012). Customary with my empirical sources, I treat the MYU as the new umbrella organization for Coptic youth activism (Informant 14, 2013; Informant 13, 2013; Informant 3, 2012a)

Focusing on the “secular turn” means that I will concentrate on the conditions that led Coptic activists to front a separation between Church and state. “In modern politics, secularism is generally invoked to denote the theoretical idea of the separation of religion (church) from the key branches of the state: the executive, judiciary, and legislature” (Jivraj, 2008: web). I regard the MYU as secular, because they oppose governing by religious authorities or principles, and holds that the state should be neutral concerning religion (Jivraj, 2008). This stands in contrast to goals and demands that are framed in a confessional or religious manner.

This type of collective action does not extend to the whole community, and it is beyond the scope of the data to statistically generalize the findings. Analyzing structural changes and discourses will, however, provide inference to establish the existence of this type of collective action. In the paragraph below I will briefly introduce the reader to the most important milestones of the secular Coptic movement.

### **1.3 The dependent variable: A brief account of secular movement development**

In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, the Coptic movement has taken shape as something separate from other collective actors in Egypt. This is not to be understood as all Coptic activists are part of what I here term the Coptic secular Movement. On the contrary, as Sika (2012) clearly documents, many Copts are participating in cross-sectarian organizations, movements, and

political parties. This is also a key in understanding the origin and stated purpose of the more “Coptic” SMOs. Partly, what these organizations want to achieve is mobilization in itself. They wish to increase the overall political participation of Coptic Egyptians, if not to put emphasis on a specific aspect of the problems relating to Copts, at least visualize the strength of Copts as a political entity (e.g. Informant 3, 2012a, Informant 13, 2013, Informant 14, 2012). In Cairo during field work in 2012 and 2013, I observed first hand demonstrations that were organized by Coptic activists. These demonstrations were not oriented at confessional goals, such as discrimination and Church attacks, but fronted demands for a secular and democratic Egypt. Their demands were directed against the regime, and not the Coptic Church. In the demonstrations there was a mix of various new and old Egyptian SMOs and parties. The MYU was a central planner, and coalesced with organizations across the opposition in order to mobilize a large number of people. The fact that they cooperate with secular political parties and organizations strengthens the argument that the movement can be classified as secular.

In terms of the organizational development, it is clear from my findings that even though the many Coptic youth organizations reject the involvement of Church in politics, there are still links between the Church and political organizations. This is not in itself unusual, but the paradox is that in this case the same organizations promote a civil and secular state, where religious intervention is banned. This is explained by the dynamics of a society where the majority of the population are Muslims, and where religious values represents the dominant political cleavages (Lust-Okar, 2013). The MYU regards the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat to the Coptic community, and does not recognize them as a political party (Informant 3, 2012b; 2012a). Accordingly, they find it appropriate to promote a governing system based on secular principles, where the Muslim Brotherhood would be banned from politics, or at least inhibited from imposing their Islamic principles on the state. Thus, the perception of the Muslim Brotherhood’s motives becomes important when analyzing the combination of Christian faith and secularism. Therefore we find “Christian” organizations fighting for secular politics.

At the dawn of the 2011 uprising, Coptic activists were divided in two camps: one confessional and one secular. The first sought political power as Christians and interested in sharing the public space with Islamism, the second opposed the Church as a political representative of Christians. A crucial difference is that while the first group separates the problems of Copts from general politics, the second does not (Soliman, 2009: 152). The

confessional tendency seeks places in political institutions with Christian ‘quotas’, and refuses to weaken the power of the Church over the Copts by banning its influence in politics.<sup>4</sup> Secular ideas were slightly gaining foothold among the Copts in the mid-2000s, when a group of intellectuals arranged conferences about the role of the Church in politics, and the notions of citizenship in Egypt (Soliman, 2009: 153; Elsässer, 2011: 296-299).<sup>5</sup> However, the spread of new and radical ideas was enabled by the increased rate of Coptic protests in the 2000s. Although many of the protests were concentrated on discrimination and other grievances of the Coptic community, there criticism of the Church and the regime also occurred.

Regardless of secular or confessional objectives, in the time before 2001 it is debatable whether or not there was Coptic collective action at all. The Coptic political influence was, for the most part, channeled through the Church hierarchy and from the clerical elite to the autocratic regime. The incredible reach of the Church in both the social, spiritual, and political sphere ensured its authority over the entire Coptic laity (McCallum, 2007). Prominent in this structure of authority was the Coptic pope, Shenouda, with the formal title Coptic Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa (McCallum, 2007: 923).<sup>6</sup>

#### **1.4 Method and Data**

Secondary and primary sources will be used in the analysis. The primary sources mainly shed light on more recent developments, while the secondary sources are used in the observations of earlier time periods. Sebastian Elsässer (2010; 2011), Elizabeth Iskander (2012), , Paul Sedra (1999; 2009; 2012) and Samer Soliman (2009; 2011; 2012) have produce extensive descriptions of historical and recent developments of Coptic community. In addition the analysis use articles from The Arab West Report’s extensive database of translated press summaries and analysis, as well as English articles from Egyptian newspapers. The thesis also briefly touches upon statistical analysis in Chapter 4. I situate the case in the context of other Middle East minority groups by using the Minorities at Risk data set from the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland.

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<sup>4</sup> There were no strictly formal Christian quotas, but in practice there has been several ways of delegating power to Christians. I discuss this further in the analysis.

<sup>5</sup> This group of intellectuals was called the “Secular Coptic Front” (Soliman, 2009: 153). The “Egyptian Enlightenment Society” may also have influenced these conferences (Elsässer, 2011: 298).

<sup>6</sup> I refer to the Pope interchangeably as either “Pope”, “Patriarch”, or “Shenouda” throughout the thesis.

The primary sources are in the form of transcribed interviews with knowledgeable informants and statements published by Coptic organizations, as well as personal observation of protests in Cairo. Among the people interviewed were news reporters, members of the Coptic Church at different levels, and political activists. Some actors within the Church, both clergy and voluntary workers, were asked about their role in contentious events, and general politics (Informant 12, 2012; Informant 2, 2012). Activists were interviewed about the goals, tactics, and organizational structures (e.g. Informant 7, 2012; Informant 6, 2012; Informant 3, 2012a). Additionally, interviews were conducted with knowledgeable informants who did not have direct attachments to the Church or activist organizations, but were regarded as well informed about Coptic contentious action, and/or the context surrounding it.

By triangulating information from this variation of sources, the reliability and validity of the findings are strengthened. A deductive approach is used to identify theoretically conditioned variables. By applying a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), the impact of these variables is analyzed both across and within the observed time periods. Using the same context across time will minimize the number of potential explanatory factors (Anckar, 2008; Lijphart, 1971).

## **1.5 Outline of thesis**

The thesis first provides the reader with background information about the Coptic community in Chapter 2. Here I describe the most important features of the Coptic communal group's current and historical situation.

Chapter 3 reviews the development of social movement theory, as well as previous Middle East social movement analysis. The chapter finishes with the construction of a conceptual framework, where I make adjustments to the theory by phrasing indicators that are context-related.

Chapter 4 discusses the methods that are used in the thesis. It uses the research question as a point of departure to justify the selection of case and method. The chapter discusses the most similar systems design, within-case analysis, and the particularity of longitudinal data, before it outlines a general analytic strategy. It finishes with an evaluation of the data sources.

With the methodical and theoretical issues out of the way, the thesis begins its analysis in Chapter 5, where the first of the thesis' three main variables, opportunity structures, is considered. The chapter starts with a within-case analysis of the three time periods, and finish with the evaluation of the indicators that was determined in Chapter 2. The analysis of

opportunity structures addresses the political conditions surrounding the Coptic community, discussing the nature of the regime and its consequences for minority politics. The alliances between Church, regime, and economic elites are found to be major factors in explaining the nature of Coptic contentious action.

Chapter 6 discusses the mobilizing structures of Coptic contentious action. Such structures consist of both the Church and organizational resources, and informal youth networks and internet communication in the later time periods. The extent to which the Church and organizations work as catalysts for mobilization is found to depend largely on the alliances that were discussed in Chapter 5, because of the resources that are controlled by the Church, and Coptic intellectual and economic elites.

Chapter 7 introduces the discourses on how to deal with politics and minority concerns in Egypt. In the first time periods these discourses are less attached to contentious collective action than later, but the chapter demonstrates that the historical pattern of nationalist versus “persecution” rhetoric to a large extent resembles the way Coptic activists talk about their concerns today. The final section of Chapter 7 will deal with the framing processes of today’s Coptic movement, with a special focus on the MYU.

Chapter 8 engages in a cross historical analysis. It identifies the most important historical continuities explaining the relative development of the secular Coptic movement. The findings are summarized in Chapter 9, and implications for policy and further research are discussed.

## **2. The Coptic case: Background**

### **2.1.1 Coptic identity and discrimination – the Coptic question**

The word ‘Copt’ derives from *Aigyptos*, the Greek word for Egypt. Arabs used “Qibtī” when they talked of Egyptians, which was adopted by the English language as ‘Copt’ (Mikhail, 1911: 2). Thus, the usage of the term has changed over the centuries, from simply being the term for Egyptian, to signifying a religious denomination. There are few other Christians in Egypt aside from the Coptic Orthodox, and the Coptic Church therefore acts as a national church. The Coptic Orthodox Church came into existence after the council of Chalcedon in AD 451 (Iskander, 2012: 11-12). The exact number of Christians in Egypt today is uncertain. A 1996 census estimates that

they number around 4.5 million, thus constituting about six percent of the Egyptian total population (Delhay, 2012: 71; Elsässer, 2011: 236).<sup>7</sup>

From AD 639, Egypt underwent a process of Islamization and Arabization. Following an Arab invasion, many Copts converted to Islam and were integrated into the new Arab communities. Arabic has fully replaced the old Coptic language, and Coptic is not widely understood among today's Copts. This is partly a consequence of the number of Copts that converted to Islam and were integrated in the Islamic communities, but also of the fact that many of those who traded with Arab rulers began to learn Arabic from early on. Arabic became Egypt's official language in AD 800 (Iskander, 2012: 11-12).

There are two aspects of Coptic historical identity to which it is worth paying attention. First, there is a consciousness of being the "original Egyptians" of pre-Islamic Egypt. Here, Egypt is also seen as an epicenter for the development of early Christianity, crucial for the spread of Christian faith. Additionally the Church considers itself a historical victim of persecution (Iskander, 2012: 12). Second, the Coptic community sought from early on to define itself as both a distinct national community and a Christian community. The Coptic Church is founded on the Greek Orthodox Church, and until the second century there were only Greek bishops in Egypt. Egyptians were, however, in opposition to a church authority that they considered a representative of the Byzantine Empire. A distinct Coptic culture developed, defining itself as different from both traditional Egyptian culture, and the Greek Orthodox Church and civilization. Priests then became leaders with both civil and religious authority. Midway into the first millennium, a movement of Coptic nationalism had taken form. The nationalist movement is considered an important contributor to the outcome of the Council of Chalcedon and the subsequent isolation from the rest of the Christian world. This isolation was compounded by the Arab conquests, putting Egypt under Arab and Islamic rule from AD 639. That said, even though Arab culture was brought to Egypt by conquest, the argument that all Copts are more closely related to ancient Egyptians is historically inaccurate. It is, however, important to recognize that this narrative is highly accepted in the Coptic community (Iskander, 2012: 13-16).

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<sup>7</sup> Although this is the latest figure from an official census, estimates vary among scholars. Iskander (2012: 12) cites the six percent estimate as a government estimate, while citing churches on estimating as high a percentage as 15. Elsässer (2011: 236) cites expatriate Coptic activists in claiming a figure as high as between 15-20 percent, but considers the official estimate of six percent to be closely accurate (according to "different independent scholars").

The issues of discrimination and a separate identity from Egyptian Muslims have led to a frequent address to the “Coptic Question” in intellectual discourses (Elsässer, 2011: 4). This refers to the existence of problems with tension between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, and how to solve them (see Elsässer, 2011; Morqos, 2009; Alhies, Qassim, Lotfy, Satik, Almoustafa and Abdel-Latif, 2011). Elsässer refers to five “dimensions” of the Coptic question, where each dimension has a documented role in the formation and development of sectarian tension: national identity, religious patriotism, human rights discourse, the contested role of the Church, and the rise of sectarian polemics (Elsässer, 2011: 173-331). This thesis does not deal explicitly with the term “Coptic Question”, but it is beyond any doubt that the contentious collective action that is explored in the coming chapters is revolving around the insecurities inherent in this problem, and that collective action is yet another way of bringing the Coptic question to the Egyptian national agenda.

### **2.1.2 Coptic grievances**

There is a tendency in the literature to represent Copts as if they are in constant resistance to persecuting forces, and as a single religious and sociopolitical bloc (Iskander, 2012: 17; Sedra, 1999: 220). There are several empirical reasons supporting such an interpretation, in addition to the historical explanation above. In 1911, a list of grievances was raised at the Coptic congress in Assiut, Egypt.<sup>8</sup> The list dealt with issues that led to systemic discrimination of Copts, such as political representation and the disfavoring of Copts for positions in Egypt’s civil service. A Muslim congress was held in Cairo in response, where the concerns of the Copts were rejected (Mikhail, 1911: 19-35).

Many of the issues raised at the Coptic congress of Assuit are still matters of concern for Coptic activists. Examples of such issues are the request of having Sunday as a holiday, and the spending of a fair share of the government’s tax income on matters that concern the Copts. These issues stem from a perception that Christians are not equal to Muslims as partners in the state. The politico-religious debate surrounding laws on conversion and laws on the building of places of worship illustrate these perceptions (Iskander, 2012; Mahmood, 2012). The legislation on both issues treats people differently on the basis of religion. For example, before 2005 one needed a presidential permission in order to build or repair a church. Even though this restriction was

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the Coptic publicist Kyriakos Mikhail himself employed the term «Grievances» in his personal account of the 1911 Coptic Congress (Mikhail, 1911: 19-30).



eased by Decree 291 in 2005, allowing governorates to issue such permissions, discriminatory practice persisted. In 2010, the continuous refusing by the Giza governorate to issue a building permit for a new church resulted in big demonstrations by the Coptic community there. Iskander interprets this as a sign of rift between the Church authorities and the Egyptian state (Iskander, 2012: 18-19).

Resistance to the building of churches is also reflected at the local level, where the Muslim population in some instances opposes construction and repair (Rowe, 2007: 339). When Copts have started repairing or building churches unpermitted, local Muslims have on numerous occasions attempted to halt construction by force (Iskander, 2012: 19). The soreness of the issue is underlined by the incentives to build mosques, and easier regulation on mosque construction. Some conditions for mosque building were specified by the Ministry of Endowments in 2001, but these differs from the church building regulations in content and strictness in several ways (Hulsman, Casper, Addeh and Fuad, 2011; Hulsman, Turner, Fastenrath and Kazanjian, 2008). Several of the most cited examples of sectarian clashes in Egypt have roots in church building. In al-Khanka in 1972, tensions arose from suspicion of a private building being used as a chapel. The building was subsequently burnt to the ground, and vandalizing of several Coptic-owned shops and properties followed (Iskander, 2012: 19-20). More recently, the clashes of October 2011 where 24 Coptic protesters were killed by the Egyptian army, originated from a church attack (Iskander, 2012: 19-20; BBC News, 2011).

The other most pressing issue that raises tension on the ground is that of religious conversion. While there is an official process to change the religion stated on your ID-card from Christian to Muslim, there is no such process to change from Muslim to Christian. Although it is not officially stated as a crime, changing religion from Islam to Christianity is difficult, and at times spurs public violence and death threats in today's Egypt (Mahmood, 2012: 57; Iskander, 2012: 20; Roy, 2012; Hulsman, 2007).<sup>9</sup> Attempts to officially change religion through the courts system has also failed (see Hulsman, 2007; Landau, 2009; Amin, 2012). In the violent clashes often cited as the Imbaba-incident of 2010, there were allegations against the Church that they were holding a Christian-to-Muslim convert against her will. Threats continued against the

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<sup>9</sup> Roy (2012) argues that there is currently a transformation of the Arab world. This transformation includes a change in religiosity on the part of both Muslims and Christians. "Religion has become more and more a matter of personal choice, whether that choice be the strict Salafist approach to Islam or some sort of syncretism, to say nothing of conversion to another religion" (Roy, 2012: 10). Conversion has traditionally been subject to much controversy and discussion. See Hulsman (2007) for a critical review.

Church until the allegedly converted woman appeared on television for the second time in 2011 to deny her conversion (Iskander, 2012: 20).

There is also an ongoing tension in Egypt regarding the relationship between religion and state. An amendment in 1980 of Article 2 in the Constitution states that Islam is the principal source for legislation. This has led to an upsurge in cases brought to the Supreme Constitutional Court by Islamists, to challenge laws that they perceived as secular (Iskander, 2012: 20). Article 2 has been, a controversial issue in the drafting process of a new Egyptian constitution in 2012 (see for example: Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2012; Hilmi, al-Zanati, Casper, Pentrice, Hulsman and Labib, 2012). Yet more controversial is the inclusion of articles that specifies the sources of Islamic sharia law (see for example AFP, 2012)

### **2.1.3 Coptic political representation – a matter for the Church or the people?**

Ever since the Congress of Assuit, the idea of Coptic political representation in Egypt has remained disputed (Iskander, 2012: 18). Political scientist Samer Soliman deals explicitly with Coptic political representation in the republican regime after the 1952 coup d'état. In the colonial period from about 1860 to 1952, Copts had many leading figures in the elite. The Free Officers, the coup leaders of 1952, had had only one Christian member in their ranks, and totally removed the old elite when they took power (Soliman, 2009: 138). Soliman argues that there has been a modern “millet system” in place since the parliamentary election under President Nasser in 1957, after which ten members of every parliament were to be handpicked by the president by constitutional right.<sup>10</sup> Although the Constitution did not specify the religion of these appointed members, some of them have in practice always been chosen from the Coptic community and from those whom the Coptic pope had approved for political positions. As such, the Church gained political prominence, while the Coptic political movement, political organizations independent from the Church, was stifled. The same happened to Islamic independent organizations. By also assigning a political role to al-Azhar (the Islamic university in Cairo), the regime fabricated an apparent representation of the political interests of both religions. In fact, both al-Azhar and the Church were forced into approving socialism as compatible with Islam and Christianity (Soliman, 2009: 137-139).

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<sup>10</sup> Millet system, coming from the Arabic word *millah*, refers to the arrangement of non-Muslim (*dhimmi*) confessional groups in the Ottoman Empire. Note that the Copts were not considered part of the officially organized Christian millets (Elsässer, 2011:100).

Soliman's argument is that more than a bottom-up fight for religious rights, the Coptic struggle in Egypt has been premised on the divide-and-rule tactics applied by the Egyptian regime (Soliman, 2009: 139). The relative political power of the Church has at all times depended on the relationship between the pope and the president, and the power of independent Coptic organizations on the willingness of the regime to suppress opposition movements. Furthermore, no purely Coptic political party has ever existed, although there has been talk of establishing one.

### **3. Social movement theory**

“Ordinary people have power because they challenge power holders” (Tarrow, 2011: 8)

While this thesis gives attention to a topic that I believe has a “real-world importance”, and is significant in a political sense, another criterion for a social science thesis is that it makes a contribution within the framework of existing social science literature (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 16). This chapter will therefore outline the “state of the art” and locate this study within a broader set of social movement studies. This increases the external validity of the study, meaning that the domain to which the study's findings can be generalized is precisely defined (Yin, 2009: 40).

To explain the relative development of secular Coptic contentious action, the thesis will adopt an analytical framework based on social movement theory (SMT). The adopted theories focus on three different explanatory variables; opportunity structure, mobilizing structures, and cultural framing. The opportunity structure refers to the political context, and thus the external environment of contentious action. Mobilizing structures refers to the resources available for actors to initiate and develop contentious action. Cultural framing refers to perceptions of the environment that shapes the goals and ideology of contentious action (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996).

The adoption of SMT as a theoretical framework functions to limit the number of explanatory variables of the analysis. Each variable is assigned a set of indicators, which will measure the variation within and across the time periods in the analysis. These indicators are in practice a further limitation of focus, and as such their selection must be justified. I do so by reviewing literature on the relevant topics, and deducting indicators that are deemed relevant for the Egyptian-Coptic context.

The chapter will first account for the development of social movement theory, in order to properly situate the study within a theoretical field. The chosen variables belong to “political process theory”, which builds on the insights from the entire spectrum of social movement research. Next I look into accounts of religious and ethnic movements, and social movements in the Middle East. Finally, I use implications from both the core literature of SMT and Middle-East oriented research to construct an analytical framework that is context sensitive.

### **3.1 Defining social movement**

Definitions of social movements are usually based on criteria from several axes. These axes include collective action, change oriented goals, some non-institutional collective action, some degree of organization, and some degree of temporal continuity. Based on these elements, Snow, Soule and Kriesi define social movements as

“Collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant *authority*, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture or world order which they are part” (Snow, Soule and Kriesi, 2004: 11, emphasis added).

This definition is inclusive, and broadens the scope of what can be counted as social movements. Still, it is not evident that the manifestation of Coptic collective action qualifies as a social movement. Therefore this thesis will assign no such labels from the outset, and subscribes to the concept of contentious collective action, defined in the introduction.

The difference in these definitions lies in the organizational structure of collective action. While the definition *social movement* requires some degree of organization, the label of *contentious collective action* is assigned whenever a number of actors are able to act together in challenging authorities or others. History has shown that Copts are able to perform collectively. The analysis in this thesis will reveal whether or not Coptic activists are close to constitute a social movement on their own, or acts as a part of a bigger movement.

### **3.2 Disciplinary developments of social movement theory**

I’ll begin this section by discussing some of the earliest innovations in the field of social movements relatively chronologically. The early theories - most prominently resource mobilization, the political process model, and cultural framing - constitute the foundation on

which political process theory (PPT) is based. It is worth noting that social movement theory developed differently in Europe and the U.S., and in McAdam's words, "European and ... American scholars continued to work in relative ignorance of each other well into the 1980s" (1996: xi). This will not be given considerable attention in the following review, but might help explain the diverging paths and developments of the analysis of social movements.

In the first descriptions on movements as social phenomena the crowd is seen as good at acting but not at reasoning, drawing on examples from the rise of fascism and Nazism (Le Bon, 1960: 16; Meyer, 2004).<sup>11</sup> Later, collective action was rationalized by "relative deprivation". In "Why men rebel" by Ted Gurr (1970) deprivation leads to aggression, which translates into collective political violence (Dalton and Kuechler, 1990; Dalton, 2008; Gurr, 1970: 13, 24). The theory was criticized for not sufficiently accounting for all the deprived, but non-contentious groups in the world as well as for not considering political variables (Dalton, Van Sickle and Weldon, 2010; McAdam, 1982) .

**Rational choice theory** explained social movements by applying the logic of the market (Tarrow, 1991). Mancur Olson (1971) emphasized that individuals would not join groups if they did not have sufficient incentives. The number of people who prefer to "free-ride" - enjoy the good once it's achieved, but not shoulder its attainment - increase proportionally with the size of the movement (Tarrow, 2011: 23). A group thereby must give incentives or impose constraints to attract activists (Olson, 1971: 51). Providing money, insurance or other kinds of benefits will make an organization more likely to succeed in its objectives (Gamson, 1975). However, Olson's theory contradicted his contemporaries, as the 70s saw a surge in social movements with limited incentives (Tarrow, 2011: 24).

**Resource mobilization theory** developed as a response to the focus of grievances in the deprivation literature, and as a "solution" to Olson's free-rider problem (Tarrow, 2011: 24). Scholars asked why some grievances are voiced, while others are not. Their answer was resources. Organizations were foregrounded as the critical element to distinguish ineffective grievances from potentially consequential protest, working as tools and resources for activists (Clemens and Minkoff, 2004: 155-156; Tarrow, 2011: 22; Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 14-15). This weakened the image of social movement participants as isolated and rootless individuals (Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 15). Professional movement organizations provided the resources

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<sup>11</sup> This view was enforced by the idea of pluralist politics among movement scholars (see Dahl, 1961)

to enforce the selective incentives suggested by Olson (McCarthy and Zald, 1979). While organizations are at the center, other resources also play a vital role to the formation and achievements of social movements (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004).

*Political opportunity theory* also arose as a corrective to rational choice theories. Political opportunities, “changes in the institutional structure or informal power relations or a given national political system” (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996), predicts variance in the longevity, content and outcomes of activist movements over time and across contexts. It emphasized the interaction of movements and institutional politics, claiming that activists do not choose goals and strategies in a vacuum, but in a political context (Meyer, 2004: 127). Eisinger (1973) first used political opportunity framework to explain variation of protest activity in the U.S. Tilly (1978) added to the theory that activists had a repertoire of contention from which they choose strategies according to political context (Meyer, 2004: 128-129). Increased opportunity implies more political space and fewer constraints. Within a single political system, circumstances can become more or less favorable over time. Some aspects of opportunity are rigid, deeply embedded in political institutions and culture. Other aspects are more volatile, shifting with policies and political actors (Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 277)

*The political process model* tradition emphasizes informal network resources in mobilization, such as churches, colleges, and informal friendship networks (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 4). The political process model merges the workings of informal resources and political opportunity, and its adherents often produce hypotheses about how they work together in the production of social movements and social movement outcomes (e.g. McAdam, 1982). The political process model differs from political process *theory* (PPT), on which the conceptual framework in this thesis is based. The difference between the two is that the former had more of an outspoken structural emphasis, drawing on resources and opportunity structures, while the latter focus more on interaction context – framing processes (Kriesi, 2004: 77-78).<sup>12</sup>

*A framing process* is the act of creating meaning to the actions of a movement (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986). David Snow adapted lessons from social psychology

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<sup>12</sup> Political process theory is also used as a general term to signify the work that builds more or less on McAdam’s (1982). PPT has less specific propositions for the working relationships between its three categories; opportunity, mobilizing structures, and framing. I interpret these relationships in a stylized model below.

(Goffman, 1959; 1974) to aid the understanding of perceptions in, and of, organizations and political structures (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986: 476).

### **3.2.1 Criticism and refinement of political process theory**

Political opportunity and political process theory has come under strong criticism for its strong emphasis on structural factors and the ambiguity relating to the conceptualization political opportunity structure. The latter point is best illustrated by a much repeated quote from the McAdam et al 1996 volume:

“The concept of political opportunity structure is in trouble, in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment. (...) It threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action. Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all” (Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 275).

Accordingly, opportunity structure is worthless without a simultaneous consideration of the cognitive processes that mediate between structure and action.<sup>13</sup> As such, they make an argument that opportunities matter, but are dependent on the more or less case-specific cultural framing of opportunities (Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 275-276; Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 16-19).

Considering this critique McAdam Tarrow and Tilly published a book that offers a more dynamic perspective (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). The three authors have gained both praise and criticism for this latest approach (see Beinin and Vairel, 2011: 6; Olzak, 2004: 686; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2003; Flacks, 2004). The above quote from Gamson and Meyer is expressing a risk of conceptual stretching, rendering a concept without meaning because of its extension (see Sartori, 1970; and Goertz, 2007).

To avoid this much criticized concept traveling, I will in the next sections discuss ethnic and religious social movements, and social movements in the Middle East. By drawing on inferences from these subfields, the analysis increases the level of context sensitivity.

### **3.3 Ethnic and religious social movements**

Arguably, Egypt’s Coptic community can be categorized as both an ethnic and a religious group (see Iskander, 2012: 11-17). Claims of ethnic and racial movements are based on markers that typically include “skin pigmentation, ancestry, language, a history of discrimination, conquest or other shared experience” (Olzak, 2004: 667). The Egyptian Copts have nearly all these markers, except different skin pigmentation (Iskander, 2012: 12-16). In daily life however, one cannot

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<sup>13</sup> This critique is discussed in detail in Goodwin and Jasper (1999).

separate between the Copt and the Muslim, except in cases where a person is carrying a religious symbol - e.g. a cross around the neck or a hijab (Scott, 2010: 199). The disputed meaning of the term “ethnic” (Hinnebusch, 2006), as well as the disunity among the Copts in terms of identity (Iskander, 2012), discourages the discussion of Coptic movements as ethnic movements.<sup>14</sup>

The emphasis in this thesis on Egyptian Copts as a distinct group from Egyptian Muslims, indicate that Coptic activists could be defined as a “religious movement”. However, in analysis of religious movements, the emphasis is usually laid more on religion per se (Kniss and Burns, 2004: 695). This thesis will not analyze the traits of Christian orthodoxy that may facilitate mobilization. Instead, it follows the political process model in treating the Church as a mobilizing structure (e.g. McAdam, 1982; Parsa, 1989).

Still, as stated in the introductory chapter, the Copts do have a particular group identity, which more or less is expected to color their political goals. In respect of this observation, I choose to classify the Coptic community as a “communal group” (Gurr, 1993). Members of communal groups share a collective identity that is important to them and those they interact with. The political significance of such identities is determined by if “(1) the group collectively suffers, or benefits from, systematic discriminatory treatment vis-à-vis other groups in a state; and/or (2) the group is the focus of political mobilization and action in defense or promotion of its self-defined interests” (Gurr, 1993: 163). Considering the literature about Coptic collective action (Soliman, 2009; Sika, 2012), these terms are more agreeable. (Gurr, 1993: 162-166, see also ; Gurr, 2000: 136; Saxton, 2005; Saxton and Benson, 2006). .

### **3.4 Social Movements in the Middle East**

#### ***Can the concept of social movements be “stretched” to Egypt?***

Social movement theory developed in two separate schools in the U.S. and Europe. The question is then: is it fair to extend the use of these theories outside western countries, such as to Egypt? With the 2011 uprisings still working as fresh raw material, the pile of academic accounts of the current developments in the Middle East are growing. Some of these apply social movement theory (Korany and El-Mahdi, 2012; Khalaf and Khalaf, 2011; Austin Holmes, 2012; Dorsey, 2012; Kurzman, 2012; Rizzo, Price and Meyer, 2012). However, the protests of 2011 were not

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<sup>14</sup> Within the ethnic movement literature, a lot of the focus is placed on the potential for ethnic conflict and irredentist movements. Olzak (2004) discusses them in much of the same terms as nationalist movements. The social analysis of the Coptic movement until now (e.g. Bayat, 2008: 185-208; Soliman, 2009; Gurr, 2000; Iskander, 2012) indicates that such an understanding of the Coptic claims would be too drastic.



the first of its kind in neither the Middle East nor Egypt, and although there are some examples, social movement theory has not been widely applied to explain the lack of democratization in the Middle East. Instead, the democratization literature has focused on the “politics from above” (Korany and El-Mahdi, 2012: 8; Vairel, 2011: 27; El-Mahdi, 2009: 1015).

Two specific conditions of the Middle East context stand out as immediately important: state authoritarianism and the predominance of Islam in society. Arab states have been viewed in light of a resilient form of authoritarianism (Korany and El-Mahdi, 2012: 8; Bellin, 2004). Meanwhile a political-culture, and sometimes orientalist, approach centers Islam (Salame, 1994; Kedourie, 1994) as well as tribal culture and persistent monarchies (Hinnebusch, 2006; Anderson, 1991) as causes of the regions particularity.<sup>15</sup> The focus on authoritarianism or Islam is also reflected in the few contributions on Arab and Middle Eastern social movements. Below, I divide these in context-sensitive and non-sensitive approaches.

### *Context-sensitive social movement analysis*

Sidney Tarrow offers the somewhat negative perspective of “warring movements”. Citing the rise in political violence by Gemeaa El-Islamyaa in Egypt in the 1990s, rebel factions in Sudan, as and Moroccan Islamist movements, he argues that the region has been haunted by a tendency for movements to turn violent. However, Tarrow sees this not as a phenomenon specific to the Middle East, but as a prevalent international trend since the fall of the Soviet Union (2011: 107). Violent Islamist movements also spurred the creation of “Security Studies”, operating without any reference to social movement theory, using a framework of rational choice and microeconomic models (Cronin, 2003; Walt, 1999). These authors thereby contributed to the exceptionalist treatment of the region.

According to Asef Bayat “it remains a question how far the prevailing social movement theory is able to account for the complexities of socioreligious movements in contemporary Muslim societies” (Bayat, 2008: 4; see also Tilly, 2004: 53). Bayat instead talks of contentious politics in the Middle East in line with what he sees as the region-specific form of activism; non-movements. These are ways of pressing for change and voicing discontent that takes place in streets, semi-public spaces, and even with conscious agendas, but not with the degree of organization that are often seen in “western” social movements (Bayat, 2008). Bayat thereby

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<sup>15</sup> Scholars have theorized extensively on what is known as “Arab Exceptionalism” – the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East. See Eva Bellin’s articles from 2004 and 2012.

presents a middle ground between the blunt application of western concepts and the Arab exceptionalist block.

### ***Applied SMT without context-sensitivity***

The most common direct application of SMT in the Middle East has been in the analysis of Islamic movements. Analyzing Islamic social institutions in Egypt, Yemen and Jordan, Clark (2004: 20) concludes that her findings are in line with the predictions of SMT; Islamic social institutions act as social movements globally. Other notable contributions, with similar findings, are Wiktorowicz's review, applying SMT on Islamic movements (2003), and Hafez's book about the rationality of Muslim protests (2003). Beinin and Vairel states that "the Middle East and North Africa can be understood using the tools that social science has developed for the rest of the world" (2011: 2). They do however precaution that the social movements they observe in the Middle East do not necessarily resemble the paradigmatic movements of the American South, the Feminist and Student movements, and mobilization for gay and lesbian rights, all crucial to the development of SMT, and specifically the concept of "new social movements" (Beinin and Vairel, 2011: 1).

Rabab El-Mahdi applied the political process model to analyze the development of social movements in Egypt from 2004 until 2007. He argued that social movement theory as it is, has a huge explanatory power for the lack of democratization in the Middle East (El-Mahdi, 2009: 1015). In their new book about Egypt in the context of the Arab spring Korany and El-Mahdi (2012) stick to political process theory. They do not claim to "offer a unified theory for contentious politics in the Middle East" (2012: 6), but show that political process theory is apt to analyze Egyptian social movements. I thereby choose to continue in their footsteps, and adopt a conceptual framework based on political process theory. This contributes to a common analytical language in the of the Egyptian post-2011 context.

### **3.5 Conceptual framework: political process theory**

In this final section of the theory chapter I specify a set of variables and indicators that can be used to analyze the development of the Coptic secular movement in the time periods under observation. I follow an approach that was recommended by Charles Tilly in the foreword to Wiktorowicz et al (2004): to ask theoretically informed questions about the relationships at hand. Every variable will have a "main question" related to the research question and theoretical conditions, and one more specific question for every indicator that follows that variable. I

produce context sensitive indicators by triangulating the categories of political process theory with insights from previous analysis of (Coptic) communal group collective action (Gurr, 1993; Gurr, 2000; Saxton, 2005; Soliman, 2009; Sika, 2012; Iskander, 2012), insights from regional SMT analysis (Beinin and Vairel, 2011; Albrecht, 2012; Sika, 2012), and experiences with social movements in authoritarian regimes (Almeida, 2003; Johnston and Figa, 1988). The variables and expectations are summarized in table 1.

The core of political process theory is based on joint effort by Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow, attempting to overcome the theoretical gaps between structuralists, culturalists and rationalists (McAdam, 2003; Flacks, 2004). A culmination of this work was an edited volume by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald in 1996, presenting a conceptual structure with three primary components: opportunity structure, cultural framing, and mobilizing structures. These will be treated as variables, and the foundation for the deduction of indicators for this thesis. Political process theory is not meant to provide explanations or predictions (Kriesi, 2004: 69), but works as a heuristic tool kit, guiding the thesis' formulation of a more precise model. Most studies employ political process theory in this way, not to test the theory, or predict, but starting with a presumption that some elements of the theory can be helpful in explaining a given case (Meyer, 2004: 132). Political process theory has been used by movement scholars in several studies to explain *development* of collective action (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 29).

### **3.5.1 Changes in the political opportunity structure**

*How do changes in political context lead to specific opportunities available to Coptic collective action?*

McAdam (1996: 27) lists four dimensions of political opportunity: (1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, (2) the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity (3) the presence or absence of elite allies (4) the state's capacity and propensity for repression. Generally, the political environment in which a movement is embedded will constitute powerful constraints on its development, and the changes of opportunity structure must be given special emphasis to understand the development of single movements. Both enduring and volatile features of political opportunities should be scrutinized. When considering the development of a movement, opportunities and constraints are dependent on the movement groups, and the interaction of a movement with its environment is important (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 12-13). Notably, McAdam

(1996) distinguishes between two dimensions of elites. The first dimension (Indicator 2) regards the configuration of elites in a regime, referring to more or less stable alliances between political elites. Here, the logic is that the tests that are posed to the steadfastness of the regime by dissident groups usually fail if they are met by a unified elite, while they will manifest and develop if contentious action reveals a split within it. The second dimension (Indicator 3) refers to the presence of allies of a given movement in the political elite, which will sponsor contentious action to strengthen their position vis-à-vis rival elite factions (Koopmans, 2004: 24).

***Indicator 1) Relative openness or closure of institutionalized political system***

A change in the institutional structure opens the possibility to apply new methods to promote the interests of a given movement. However, this conditions that the movement has the ability to identify the eventual crack in the system, and mobilize to benefit from it (McAdam, 1996: 29).

With regard to the Coptic movement, two aspects of institutional openness should be considered, namely that of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and that of the Egyptian state. This is because Coptic actors have been trying to voice Coptic grievances both inside and outside the Church, and the previous role of the Coptic Pope as not only a religious leader, but a political leader (Soliman, 2009: 140). By state openness I here refer to the openness of political access, through elections and access to politicians (Tarrow, 1996: 54; Meyer, 2004: 131). In autocratic regimes, increasingly competitive elections provide previously excluded groups with an arena to begin organizing drives (Almeida, 2003: 349), and will therefore be given careful attention. Notably, access and contentious action are found to be related by a curvilinear relationship, meaning that both very open and very closed systems serve to constrain contentious action. Contentious action is likely in systems with a mix of open and closed factors (Tarrow, 1996: 54). I choose to think of the Church in the same way as the state. The Church too has its own elections, and the Church may to a certain extent be considered an extension of the state due to the periodically close ties between the regime and the Church (Sedra, 1999; Soliman, 2009).

*How did specific changes in the access to state and Church institutions affect the process of collective action development?*

***Indicator 2) Stability of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity***

The development of divisions within previously stable elites is fundamental to the occurrence of major social mobilization (Skocpol, 1979), as well as reform movements (McAdam, 1982). The alignments of elites encourage contentious action when they become unstable and segments of

the elite search for support in subaltern classes (Tarrow, 1996: 55). The configuration of actors is a normal emphasis for authors of social movement case studies, because it allows for the observance of change over time on a presumed influential variable (Kriesi, 2004: 75), which is precisely what I seek to do in this thesis. Two different concepts related to the configuration of elites in Egypt and the Coptic communal group is important to keep in mind in the analysis: patrimonialism and the “neo millet system”.

The elite alignments in Middle Eastern autocratic regimes (and this is also true for Egypt) have been built on a specific kind of patrimonialism. The central element is a dominant and personalist leader over the rest of the ruling elite. The leaders use the likeness of certain indigenous traits, for example kin, graduating class, tribe or sect, to link themselves to “trusted men” who head the structural instruments of power. This tactic was combined with the use of monetary patronage, in the form of oil money and foreign aid, to secure the loyalty of key groups (Hinnebusch, 2006: 382). The Egyptian regime has maintained alliances with the business elite, including the Coptic upper class. Sedra has written extensively on how the Copts are divided in terms of class (1999; 2009; 2012), and how this has served to pacify the laity. There has been a shift on the long historical term, in the relative importance of elites in the laity, versus elites in the Clergy. Today, members of the Clergy, and perhaps especially the Pope, is seen as representatives of the Coptic community overall. This has led to a conflation of Church and community in both journalistic and scholarly analysis of the Copts (Sedra, 2012). This is not without reason. As was argued in Chapter 2, the Church was assigned a political role under the Mubarak regime, enforcing a modern version of the Ottoman millet system (Soliman, 2009: 139). Sika (2012) as well, asserts that historically there has been a mutual dependency between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Egyptian regime, thus treating the Church as part of the opportunity structure. The Coptic pope has often been a symbolic and manifest representation of the state-church relationship (Sika, 2012: 68).

*How does the alignment of the Egyptian political, economic, and clerical elites encourage or discourage the development of Coptic collective action?*

***Indicator 3) The presence or absence of elite allies***

Political process theory assumes that emergence of new allies within a previously unresponsive political system is linked with movements that aim at institutional reform. Such allies can play a role as direct sponsors to movements that are less radical rather than completely revolutionary

(McAdam, 1996: 30). Accordingly, one should expect the development of collective contentious action to be influenced by its bonds to elites. The emergence of allies in autocratic regimes often depends on

Based on the discussion under the previous indicator, one should consider allies in both the clergy and politics to be important.

*Question: Do the Coptic secular movement have elite allies in either the clergy or politics, and how do these affect the process of changing collective action?*

#### ***Indicator 4) The state's capacity and propensity for repression***

A decrease in the will to repress activism tends to be related to the rise of non-institutionalized protest movements, without necessarily granting the activists institutionalized access to the political system (McAdam, 1996: 30). That said, whether or not repression, thought of as a dichotomous variable, spurs or restricts more contentious action, is still up for debate (El-Mahdi, 2009: 1028). In the 2011 uprising, Korany and El-Mahdi argues, repression only strengthened the number of protesters (Korany and El-Mahdi, 2012: 11). While media reports and reports by human rights associations in Egypt serves as good indicators of state repression, the task of this indicator is to pinpoint if there is a traceable repression that affects the development of the Coptic secular movement. This indicator points to repression by state authorities, not to discrimination or other types of grievances that may be experienced from other actors in civil society.

*What is the capacity and propensity to repress Coptic collective actors specifically?*

#### **3.5.2 Mobilizing structures**

*What formal and informal institutions support the mobilization of Copts, and how do they work?*

Mobilizing structures are “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 3). Mobilizing structures draw largely on the theoretical traditions of resource mobilization and the political process model (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 3-4). Mobilizing structures take different shapes and work in different ways in various contexts. “The vehicles” of mobilizing structures are exemplified by, on the informal side, social networks, neighborhoods and networks of colleagues. More formal nonmovement mobilizing structures include churches, unions, and professional associations. In addition to these examples, comes a host of both formal and informal structures that are movement-specific, such as activist networks and protest committees (McCarthy, 1996: 145).

### ***Indicator 1) The Coptic Church as mobilizing structure***

In the treatment of Coptic collective action Sika (2012) concludes that the church has been mobilizing Copts since the fall of Mubarak to participate in Egyptian politics. As such, the Church should be analyzed as a mobilizing structure. This also resonates with the overall findings of SMT (McAdam, 1982; Parsa, 1989). Kriesi (1996) categorize churches as supportive service organizations. These types of organizational structures do not directly take part in the mobilization for collective action, but they work on behalf of contentious actors, and have personnel that sympathize with them (Kriesi, 1996: 152). Johnston and Figa propose that in authoritarian contexts, Churches have additional roles vis-à-vis the regime. They often enjoy a special protected status, and are thus provided with material resources and media-access that other organizations lack. Their interpersonal networks may work as a bridge across divergent class interests, enabling them to play an enhanced role as catalysts and facilitators of collective action (Johnston and Figa, 1988: 35-38). There is not much literature on how churches work as mobilizing structures in the Middle East specifically, but with regard to Islamic movements, the conclusions are quite clear: the mosques play vital roles in performing those functions that are described above (Parsa, 1989; Robinson, 2004; Bayat, 1998; 2008).

*Does the development of Coptic collective action benefit from the Church's resources and interpersonal network?*

### ***Indicator 2) Informal youth networks***

One should not underestimate the impact of some the conventional wisdom drawn from the Arab uprising of 2011. Although it might have been given too much weight as an independent explanatory factor in much of the popular writings about the Arab spring (Ray, 2011; El-Ghobashy, 2011; Herrera, 2011), social media and electronic communication clearly had a role in the mobilization in 2011 (Khondker, 2011; Carapico, 2012: 212-213). This type of network stands in contrast to the Church as mobilizing structure, as a channel that is open to all people with cell phones and internet access. Among Copts youths are the predominant users of new information technology (Iskander, 2012: 65). The youth has also been fronted by both academics and news media as the frontrunners of the Arab spring (Khalaf and Khalaf, 2011). Youth can be seen in this context not only as a signification of young age (Wyn, 2011: 36). Bayat (2011: 48) argues that young people's social position between dependence and independence (of adults), makes them more susceptible to participate in collective action. Further, Bayat affirms that youth

in Egypt remained relatively immobilized until the advent of web-based communication in the 2000s (2011: 51; see also Shehata, 2012: 112).

*How does informal youth networks and information technology affect the development of Coptic collective action?*

### ***Indicator 3) The appearance of Coptic secular SMOs***

While their collective action may emerge within established institutions or informal networks, its continuous development requires an enduring organizational structure. This often entails the creation of SMOs (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 13-16). A SMO may be defined as a “complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or countermovement, and attempts to implement those goals” (McCarthy and Zald, 1987, cited in Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 140). This is a rather strict definition in terms of degree of organization (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). I thereby ignore the calls by Asef Bayat and others who emphasize the importance of less formalized forms of association in contentious collective action in the Middle East (Bayat, 1998; 2008). Analysis of the post-25 January environment has revealed a rapid growth of SMOs in Egypt (Tadros, 2011; Rizzo et al., 2012; Dorsey, 2012). I will not consider political parties as SMOs, as they normally do not mobilize their constituents in the same fashion as SMOs, but concentrate their efforts on political representation (Kriesi, 1996).

*Did establishment of SMOs affect the development of Coptic collective action?*

### **3.5.3 Framing processes**

*Do the framing processes produce a frame of secularism?*

I follow Snow’s original conception, defining framing as “conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 6). I consider two items to be the most important objects of framing processes: grievances and opportunity structures.

Deep seated grievances about group status motivates communal mobilization (Gurr, 1993: 166-167; Gurr, 2000). However, grievances are contingent on a process of framing to translate into collective action. Those grievances that resonate with people are the ones that find their way to social movement agendas. The most important Coptic grievances are various forms of



structural discrimination manifest in state laws, physical attacks by Islamist groups and religious freedom (Soliman, 2009: 141-142).

The political opportunity structure of collective action is also subject to framing. The activists identify threats, allies, the shape of the regime, and opponents and shape common perceptions about them. In order to understand whether or not a political opportunity has worked to the loss or benefit for the development of collective action, one must investigate how the activists view their context (Gamson and Meyer, 1996). Above I defined four indicators to measure opportunity structures surrounding the Coptic secular movement. How these opportunities are framed is likely to determine how the Coptic collective actors respond to their environment.

***Indicator 1) The Church and framing processes***

Collective action is dependent on shared understandings in both early and late stages of insurgency. In the earlier phases, the efforts to frame grievances and opportunities will be less strategic. The initial framing process may take place within established organizations and institutions, but will not be recognized by the organizational leadership (McAdam et al., 1996: 16). Sika (2012: 68) found that over the past decade, the Coptic church has helped fostering a counter-Islamic identity among Egyptian Copts. As I suspect the church of also being a mobilizing structure, and thus facilitative context for the initial processes of framing, it is probable that this identity has been transmitted to Coptic activists. The perception of Islamism as a threat is also likely due to the above stated grievances of discrimination. Knowing that the Church is the Copts' most important institution, the following indicator is necessary:

*How does the Church frame the grievances and opportunities of the Coptic communal group?*

***Indicator 2) Framing processes and collective actors***

Framing turns from being a product of the early mobilizing structure and grievances to being the result of more formal organizational procedures once representative SMOs are in place. Over time the shaping of frames is likely to be more conscious, as a part of the strategic efforts by SMOs. In experienced SMOs, various activists within the movement will struggle to determine the most effective way of bringing the movement's message to the people (McAdam et al., 1996: 16-17).

*How are grievances and opportunities framed by collective actors?*

### ***Indicator 3) Framing processes in media discourses***

In the broader environmental context the political establishment may act negligent of initial framing efforts. This attitude tends to change when a movement manages to establish itself as a serious force for social change. The frames will then be contested both within and outside of the movement by both the state and prospective counter movements. These contests are filtered through news media, and will therefore be contingent on the sympathies and independence of the media (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 16-17).

*How do popular discourses frame the grievances and opportunities of the Coptic communal group?*

### **3.5.4 Linking mobilizing structure, opportunity and framing**

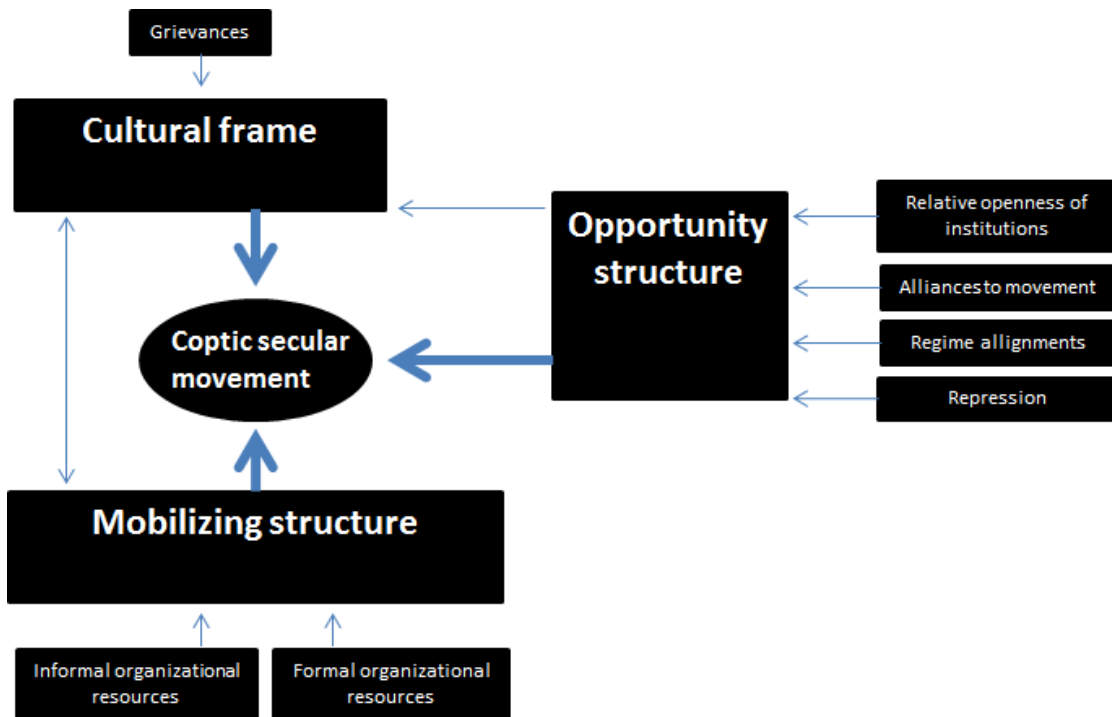
Jon Elster reduces the concept of political opportunity to “nuts and bolts”, arguing that human action is the result of two filtering operations: all constraints on an individual, reducing alternative options to an “opportunity set”, and the actor’s desires, determining the choice within the opportunity set. Elster holds that action is determined by desire as well as the actors belief about the opportunities (Elster, 1989: 13 and 20). An implication from this insight is that *beliefs* control the available opportunities to a given actor, and as such, structure is not always seen as something completely neutral and independent of the actor (Kriesi, 2004: 68).

Below is presented a stylized representation of the discussion about the interplay between mobilizing structure, opportunity structure, and framing from the McAdam et al 1996 volume (Figure 1). McAdam stress that the effects of the three variables are interactive rather than independent (1996: 8). Gamson and Meyer argue that political opportunities are subject to framing, and are often the source of internal movement disagreements about appropriate strategies for action (1996: 276). By taking both variables (opportunity and framing) into consideration, one can integrate the internal processes of social movements with the analysis of the context in which they emerge. Even if there are “objective effects” on power relations by opening of opportunity structures, they are also, when significant, likely to increase awareness of change. Thus, the opening contributes the cognitive recognition of an opportunity, affecting the cultural framing of a political system. To symbolize the negotiation between framing and opportunities the model draws an arrow between cultural frame and opportunity.

System critical framing processes occur among groups of people. Accordingly, framing processes are held to be far more likely under conditions of strong rather than weak organization

(McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 8-9). Therefore, there is an arrow drawn between cultural frame and mobilizing structure in the figure below. SMOs rely heavily on their goals to interact successfully with their environment. Interactions with outside actors, such as the media and the state, are for the most part shaped by such goals. Embodied in the goals are the perceived threats to the group's interests and opportunities to achieve interests. Groups with many goals tend to attract a larger crowd, because of the potentially wider impact area. However, many goals also spread a movement's resources thin, and might create disputes over how to distribute resources as well as dissension. In sum, the fate of movements depends heavily on their own actions. For developing movements, political opportunities and framing processes are more a product of organizational dynamics, than in the phase of emergence (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 13-16). Framing is also likely to be colored by mobilizing structure. For example, due to the centrality of the black church for civil rights movement in the United States, many framings that came out of the movement had a religious cast to them (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996: 11). In the same manner, the internal structures of SMOs are likely to affect framing. The leadership is singled out as crucial to the framing processes of organizations (Morris and Staggenborg, 2004: 183-186).

**Figure 1) Stylized model of political process theory**



### 3.5.5 Summary of conceptual framework

The table below presents a set of expectations for every time period: Each indicator in the table is treated as a binary variable with an expectation of it being either present or not. However, the treatment of each variable will be more complex in the analysis. By using within-case analysis in all the time periods, the question of how and when every variable works will be more carefully scrutinized. The analytical strategy will be further discussed in the next chapter.

**Table 1) Summary of variables and expectations**

Independent Variables	Indicators	Expectations		
		1981-2001	2001-2011	2011-2013
<b>Opportunity structure</b>	Closed or open institutional access?	Closed	Closed	Open
	Are elite alignments stable or volatile?	Stable	Stable to volatile	Volatile
	Does the secular Coptic movement have allies in the elites?	No	Yes	Yes
	State capacity/propensity for repression high or low?	High	High	Low
<b>Mobilizing structures</b>	Does the Church act as a collective vehicle in this period?	No	Yes	Yes
	Do informal youth networks act as a collective vehicle in this period?	No	No to yes	Yes
	Existence of secular Coptic SMOs	No	No to yes	Yes
<b>Framing</b>	Is the prevailing discourse sectarian or secular?	Sectarian	Sectarian to secular	Secular
<b>Dependent Variable</b>	Process of collective action development	No collective action	Confessional collective action	Secular collective action

## **4. Method**

In this chapter I first explore the implications of the research question, which justifies the selection of method. Thereafter I describe case study method and the most similar systems design, and why this is a useful approach for this thesis. I move on to emphasize the implications of a longitudinal design, and how historical data should be considered. In section 4.5 I justify the case selection, and situate the case within a context of other cases of contentious action in the Middle East. The chapter is concluded by evaluating the data sources, and providing an overview of informants, and the secondary literature used in the analysis.

### **4.1 Implications of research question**

“What explains the development of a secular Coptic movement from 1981 to 2012?”

The objective of this research question is to identify explanations of a specific social development, and is thus an example of an explanatory research question. *Development* refers to a change in the value on the dependent variable, movement development. The term “movement” links the question to social movement theory, thus adding an important element of theoretical understanding to the specific case. As the study contains elements of discovery of a new phenomenon, the research question also call for descriptive information. As such, the main objective of the study is to provide explanation for a phenomenon, secondly to theoretically contextualize the phenomenon, and thirdly to provide some new descriptive information about this phenomenon.

When the research question is associated with such objectives, rather than say accounting for the spread of a phenomenon, a case study is a qualified method to answer it. This is because it deals with “operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence” (Yin, 2009: 9). In more practical terms, in order to explain the development of the secular movement, it is necessary collect information about to the perceptions, organization and context of Coptic contentious action. I use social movement theory as a filter to select relevant data. These data are compared across three time periods, making it possible to isolate variables explaining the changing nature of contentious action (Przeworski and Teune, 1970).

### **4.2 The case study and internal validity**

In political science one often makes a distinction between the case study and the comparative case method, which compares a small number of cases (Yin, 2009: 19). In line with George and Bennett (2005: 18) this thesis regards the definition of case study methods to include the

comparative case method as well. Instead of naming each historical period a “case” I refer to them as observations, or simply time periods. There are many advantages to using a case method to answer an explanatory research question. The analysis achieves higher levels of conceptual validity than with statistical methods, and thereby is more likely to avoid conceptual stretching (George and Bennett, 2005: 19). Conceptual stretching, also referred to in section 2.3 in the theory chapter, refers to the application of concepts in contexts where they don’t belong. Sartori (1970) contended that an uncritical “travelling” with the available western vocabulary of politics empties our concepts of meaning. The advantage of the case study is that it allows the analysis to be thorough to the extent that I can specify how these dynamics work in a different context. Case studies avoid coding errors, and allow for detail-attentive analysis and formulation of indicators that more accurately measure the theoretical concepts (George and Bennett, 2005: 18-19). Consequently, in Chapter 2 I formulated theoretically informed questions to serve as indicators (Wiktorowicz, 2004: ix-xii). Thus, the conceptual validity is higher than if a universalist position were to be followed.

Internal validity generally refers to a study’s ability to support a given causal chain, and exclude alternative paths (Ryen, 2002: 178; Yin, 2009: 40). The context-sensitive approach of a case study increases the ability to study how causal mechanisms operate in detail in individual cases (George and Bennett, 2005: 21). This feature is important when discussing contentious action and social movements. Political process theory, as it is presented in “Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements” does not specify a recipe for how to apply the suggested variables (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996). The ways variables affect each other are context dependent, and the causal mechanisms must accordingly be identified on a case-to-case basis. Mechanisms are commonly understood as “a set of hypotheses that could be the explanation for some social phenomenon, the explanation being in terms of interactions between individuals and other individuals, or between individuals and some social aggregate” (Checkel, 2007: 2). The identification of mechanisms is generally associated with the method of process tracing. Process tracing seeks to identify the causal chain between the independent and dependent variable, and the outcome of the dependent variable (George and Bennett, 2005: 206). I will not explicitly apply the vocabulary of process tracing in this thesis. However, I will use the advantage of the case study in providing a thick description of how my three independent variables work in each of the time periods. The within-time-period analysis will map out the influential factors on

contentious action, but the limited space in a master thesis, as well as the availability of data, set constraints on the capacity to take every alternative causal chain into account. Hence, I cannot rule out the possibility of equifinality, meaning that several causal paths may lead to the same outcome (see George and Bennett, 2005: 207; Goertz and Mahoney, 2006: 232).

However, I limit overdetermination by the theoretical constraints laid out in the previous chapter, and isolating the independent variables by conducting a historical comparison across three time periods constituting a total of 32 years. The benefit of the “variable-language” is that it clarifies to the reader the exact theoretical propositions that are adopted, and which ones that are not, thus enabling criticism of the variable selection.

The next section will describe the layout of this comparative approach.

**Table 2) Case characteristics**

<b>Case / Unit of analysis</b>	Coptic communal group/ Coptic secular movement
<b>Observations</b>	Egypt 1981-2001 Egypt 2001-2011 Egypt 2011-2013
<b>Informants</b>	Activists Clergy Knowledgeable informants
<b>Sources of data triangulation</b>	Previously published and unpublished research News articles Opinion Articles Survey Data

### **4.3 The most similar systems design**

The study is conducted by analyzing the Coptic communal group in three different time periods. The first time period is from 1981, Mubarak’s year of inauguration, to 2001, the year of the first major Coptic street protest since 1971. The second time period is from 2001 to 2011, the year of the late Egyptian uprising, and the third ends at the end of 2012, months after the passing of pope Shenouda. Aiming to explain the development of a movement in Egypt, the most comparable case with a different outcome is Egypt in recent history. The analytical case is the same in all

time periods, but the comparison still complies with the comparative method. The systemic characteristics are controlled for, while sub systemic variables are used as explanatory variables (Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 33).

George and Bennett (2005) argue that the division of a longitudinal case into separate observations often is the strongest form of controlled comparison. However, because there is variation in several of the independent variables across time, only weak inference can be drawn from the use of only controlled comparison (George and Bennett, 2005: 81). Therefore, the MSSD is supplemented with within-case analysis of the time periods. Using the comparative method increases the number of observations, a solution to the problem of “many variables, small N” (Lijphart, 1971: 684-686). The number of variables that can explain change in contentious collective action is thereby reduced. This remedies the risk of over-determination, by discarding variables that are time-constant throughout the time-span of the analysis (Lijphart, 1971: 689).

As additional control, the analytical framework that was constructed in Chapter 2 is a product of theoretical triangulation. The three independent variables are often used separately by social movement scholars. By forcing a consideration of the data in light of all the three variables, the precision in constructing the most likely explanation increases (Yin, 2009: 116; Patton, 2002: 562). The combination of analyzing both opportunity structures and cultural framing is especially important in this regard. Investigating not only the political context, but the actors’ perceptions of the context singles out the structures that are most important (Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 17-18).

What further complicates this issue however, is that Egypt in 2012 has experienced Egypt in 2001, and therefore does not represent an isolated observation, an important weakness of longitudinal comparison (Ragin, 1987: 38). Consequently, there must be a conscious treatment of the time dimension in the analysis. This will be further embellished in the next section.

#### **4.4 History matters**

While it is quite clear from the thesis’ case study design, split into three observational time periods, that historical development will play a large part for the inferences that are made, the recent literature on how to treat history in the social sciences calls for an elaboration of how this is done. Both unrepeated random events and systematically repeated events occur and have severe impact on the shape of history (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 56; Tarrow, 1995: 471). Historical events often function as tipping points that affect the relationship between variables,



and qualitative research is often the best way to uncover such tipping points. Historical data is therefore useful in assisting researchers to understand shifts in the value of systematic variables (Tarrow, 1995: 472).

Collective action is often associated with what scholars of historical social analysis call “positive feedback” (Pierson, 2004: 33). Positive feedback is in short terms what economists call “increasing returns processes”, a process that is self-reinforcing (Pierson, 2000: 251). Late research on social movement organizations also reveals their continuity is largely a result of positive feedback (Skocpol, 1999: cited in ; Pierson, 2004: 34). Generally, politics is prone to positive feedback processes because of its short-sightedness, while implications of political decisions stretch far into the future (Pierson, 2004: 41-43). These notions have implications for the treatment of variables in historical analysis. One should assume that the value of a variable at a given time ( $t$ ) may be dependent on its value at a previous point in time ( $t^{-1}$ ). In quantitative analysis of panel data, such an effect is called autocorrelation, and can be controlled for by the use of statistical tools. In qualitative analysis however, one should be more specific in estimating how and why certain variables are time constant while others are not. In politics, relatively small events early in a sequence may set political development on a certain track, blocking the potential for later “bigger events” to affect it. The timing of an event therefore matters. This implicates that in any political analysis one needs to look back in time for answers, while at the same time avoiding being trapped in an “infinite regress” where every event is linked in an infinite chain (Pierson, 2004: 45).

Path dependence and positive feedback have clear relevance for this particular case. The interview data that was gathered for this thesis largely centers thematically on the events that preceded and followed soon after the 2011 Egyptian uprising. The analysis of historical data is thereby added to counterbalance this emphasis on very recent events.

In this thesis, there are several examples of long historical processes that may have affected the outcome which is to be analyzed. Consider for example the exile of Pope Shenouda under Sadat. Prior to his exile, Shenouda ordered priests out on the street to demonstrate. Through his speeches he showed courage to stand up against the president. However, when Shenouda came back from exile, he was a changed man. After his return, Shenouda discouraged contentious action outside the Church, and remained discouraging throughout his tenure as a Pope, a total of 27 years.

## **4.5 The case of Coptic contentious collective action and its relatedness to similar cases**

The case in a case study connotes a spatially and timely delimited phenomenon, comprising the phenomenon that the inference of the analysis attempts to explain (Gerring, 2007: 19). This study is spatially and timely delimited to Egypt between 1981 and 2012, and comprises a phenomenon of communal group collective action.

The case of Coptic contentious action was selected because of the interesting shift of contentious collective action over time, thus adhering to a principle of selecting a case where the dependent variable seems to exhibit the variation that the researcher seeks to explain (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 108).<sup>16</sup> The case is thereby selected non-randomly, avoiding a set of observations which does not vary either on the dependent nor the independent variables (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). There is no point in trying to hide however, that the case and research question was selected partly on the basis of interest and access to potential observation and interview data. The latter point is emphasized by Yin, who writes “absent such access, you should consider changing your research questions, hopefully leading to new candidates to which you do have access” (Yin, 2009: 26). Nevertheless, a case should always be situated within a universe of other similar cases. “Framing it within a quantitative database makes it possible to avoid generalizing on the occasional ‘great event’ and points to less dramatic – but cumulative – historical trends” (Tarrow, 2010: 106; see also Tarrow, 1995: 472; Tilly, 1993; Tilly, 1994).

### **4.5.1 Communal groups and variation in collective action**

The Egyptian Copts can, as demonstrated in the theory chapter, be categorized as a communal group. Communal groups in the Middle East exhibit considerable variation in level of collective contentious action. By using a dataset from the “Minorities at Risk” project (MAR) this variation can be illustrated, by looking at two variables measuring *protest* and *rebellion* between 2004 and 2006. These are ordinal categorical variables with a range from 0 to 5 and 0 to 7. Protest is measured by the scale of demonstrations, while rebellion is measured by scale and intensity of violent activity (Minorities at Risk project, 2009a: 22).<sup>17</sup> If other potential cases bear resemblance in terms of being religious minorities facing a Muslim majority, similar dynamics may be expected to occur. Considering only the score for *protest*, the mean score globally is 1.22, while

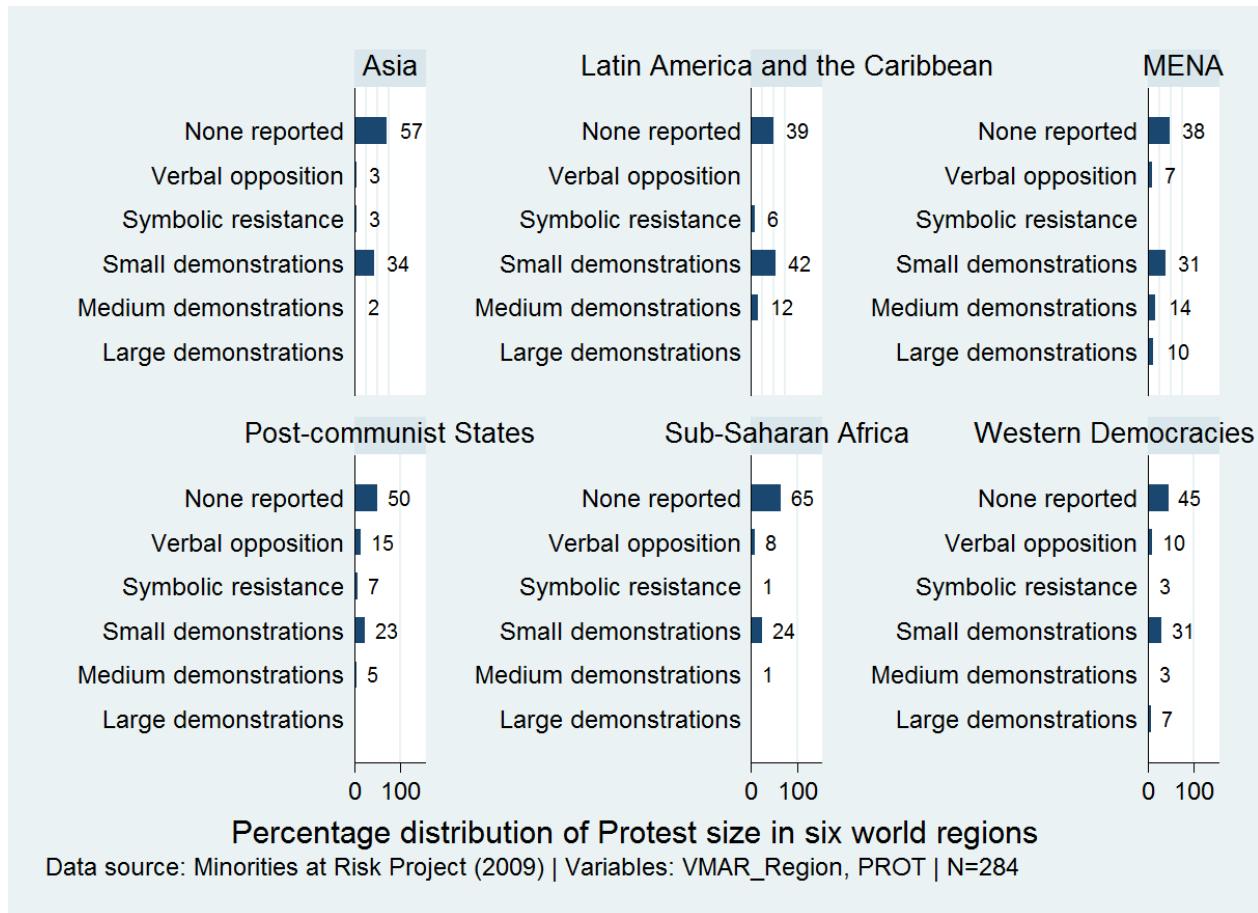
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<sup>16</sup> See Collier, Brady, and Seawright (2010a:146) for criticism of this principle.

<sup>17</sup> See table 4 in appendix for the specific coding of “Process” and “Rebellion”.

the mode and median score is 0. The Copts have a score of 3 (small demonstrations) in 2004 and 2006, and a score of 0 (none reported) in 2005. Figure 2 below displays the distribution on the variable protest by region.

**Figure 2) Contentious communal groups by region**



Source: Minorities at Risk project (2009b)

Figure 2 shows categorical plots protests among communal groups across world regions (the variation of the variable “protest” over its four ordinal values). The scores are communal groups’ mode value of protests in 2004, 2005, and 2006. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region seems slightly more contentious than the others, except for the Latin America and the Caribbean region. Ten percent of reported protests were “large demonstrations”, more than in any other region. Contentious collective action of this scale was unseen among communal groups in post-communist states and Sub-Saharan Africa. Notably, small demonstrations are the most common size of protests in the MENA and the other regions, emphasizing the typicality of the Coptic case. To check if the variation is significantly different among regions one can use a Chi

squared test. A “significant difference” means that the difference in variation between regions is not likely to be random. The Chi-square is 53.6, and the p-value equals 0.001. In real terms, this means that there is less than one percent likelihood that the variables (world region and level of protest) are independent of each other. Accordingly, some regional-specific variables are probably causing the difference in variation across regions. By doing the same test for variation among MENA-countries, I get a chi-square of 123.2 and a 0.00 p-value, indicating that the variation at country level is non-random as well. As such, there is need for within-country analysis to determine the actual causes of communal group collective action. However, considering the very low number of observations in the second test (87 observations in 13 countries) this probability must be taken with a large pinch of salt (Midtbø, 2012: 78-80).

#### **4.5.2 Collective action and Group Size**

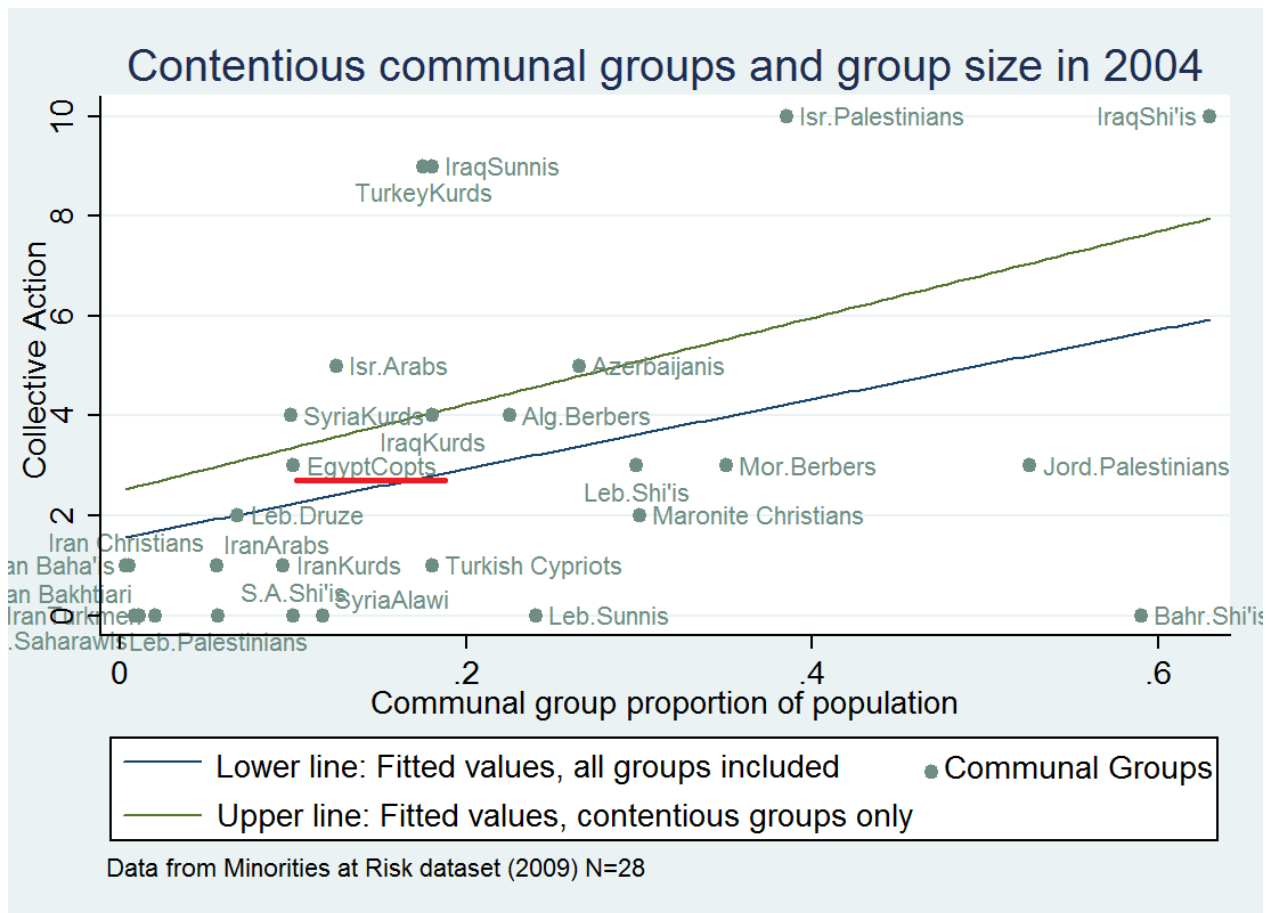
In order to further contextualize the case within a universe of communal groups in the MENA, the case can be situated in relation to a bivariate relationship between group size and collective action. This comparison is important for two reasons. First, relative group size is considered an important variable in explaining variation in communal group collective action across countries. The relative size of a group impacts its chances to play a political role (Saxton and Benson, 2006; McCallum, 2007: 924). Second, relative group size is a structural variable that is relatively time-constant; hence it cannot be analyzed as an independent variable in a single case study, such as this one.

To illustrate the variation in protest and rebellion taken together I summarize the scores of protest and rebellion to one scale, which I call “violent and non-violent collective action” (the two measures are analyzed together in for example Saxton, 2005; Saxton and Benson, 2006).<sup>18</sup> The mean score among 28 communal groups in the MENA in 2004 is 2.89. The Copts keep their score of 3, and are as such close to the mean score.

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<sup>18</sup> The 0-5 score of protest and the 0-7 score of rebellion are summarized to one indicator. Findings by by Asal, Legault, Szekely and Wilkenfeld (2013) suggest that rebellion and protest are usually not utilized by the same organizational structures. Ergo, protest and rebel as defined by MAR is not the same phenomenon, and the interpretation of the combined score must be done with caution. Nevertheless, lumping the two indicators together is interesting from analytical point of view, as it can tell me something about the total extent of both violent and non-violent contentious collective action for each communal group.

**Figure 3) Collective action and communal group proportion of population in the MENA**



*Data source: Minorities at Risk project (2009b; 2009a: 5)*

Figure 3 shows a scatter plot of communal groups in the MENA in year 2004. The x-variable is communal group proportion of population, and the y-variable is collective action (violent and non-violent). The fitted values are pulled down by the negative skewness of the y-variable, visible with all the scores of zero at the bottom of the figure.<sup>19</sup> For that reason I have included two fitted lines in the plot, one that considers all the observations (lower line), and one that only considers the observations with a score higher than zero on the y-variable (upper line).<sup>20</sup> Copts are situated between the two lines. In a bivariate regression with the two variables above (included the zero-scores) the residual is 0.8, and the Coptic communal group can thereby be considered a typical case in the relationship between collective action and group size (Gerring,

<sup>19</sup> Skewness: 1.12

<sup>20</sup> Hence, the population can be either “contentious communal groups” or “communal groups”.

2007: 94). According to Gerring, when a case is typical the probability of a case representativeness is high, relative to other cases (Gerring, 2007: 91-97).

The Coptic communal group case can hence be considered typical in terms of the level of contentious collective action in relation to other communal groups in the MENA. This does not imply that the same combination of variables has the same effect on contentious collective action in every country, but it does mean that it is worthwhile looking into the same dynamics across cases. The Druze in Lebanon for example, is another communal group close to the lower fitted line, hence a typical case. It is also defined by its religion, similar to Copts. They are not materially worse off than the average population, and they are situated in a country with a Sunni/Shiite Muslim majority (Haddad, 2001).<sup>21</sup> Their level of collective action in 2004 is 2, which is typical for their group size. As such, the inferences that are made from the findings in this thesis can spawn hypotheses for the development of Druze collective action (Gerring, 2007: 97).

### **4.5.3 Selection of time frame**

While the above paragraphs and figures contextualize the case spatially, the case is also limited by a time frame. To explain the development of the Coptic secular movement, it is suitable to compare the movement in three points in time, where it was absent in the first period, weak in the second and relatively strengthened in the third. The selection of three instances within the same country secures the comparability between the observations and context sensitivity. At the same time, this poses a challenge to the assumed independence between the observations. This will be dealt with by consciously looking for path-dependent processes, and employing thick description to draw empirical inferences.

## **4.6 Data sources – validity and reliability**

### ***Qualitative Interviews***

The interviews were conducted on a field trip to Egypt in November to December 2012, and in January 2013. The interview data has two purposes. The first is fact-gathering, to obtain insight from the informants about concrete descriptions of events, history, actors and organizations. The second is to grasp the perceptions of reality of central actors in the Coptic secular movement (see Ryen, 2002: 144), to especially shed light on the current framing of opportunity structures and

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<sup>21</sup> Druze is a Muslim religion, but different from Shiite and Sunni (Haddad, 2001)

grievances. It would be over-optimistic to claim that a point of saturation has been reached for both of these purposes (Ryen, 2002: 93). Instead I show what informants that are consulted, in table 5 (see appendix). As such, later studies can provide alternative samples, shedding light on the subject from a different angle. The informants are mostly people deemed to be knowledgeable about Coptic contentious politics (Ryen, 2002: 87). The informants have roles in institutions and organizations that are affected by, or participate in the Coptic secular movement. They are concentrated in urban districts, and mostly belong to the middle and upper-middle classes. Interviews were conducted in English when the informants' command of English allowed it and in Arabic when this was not the case, by the use of a translator. The translator also worked as door opener and interview object, as his insights in various aspects of the theme were deemed valuable. The access to informed members of social movement organizations was at times limited because of the ongoing protests at the time of the fieldwork.<sup>22</sup>

With the main bulk of informants I conducted semi-structured interviews. There is no consensus regarding the degree to which an interview should be formalized. In most of the interviews the objective was to gain information about the informants' perspective. Under such objectives, too much structure will work against the purpose of the interview, as well as exclude the importance of context (Ryen, 2002: 97). Informants were asked open ended questions to the extent possible, but assumptions about the phenomena were probed during the interviews unless they were explicitly dealt with by the informants. The questions asked varied from interview to interview.<sup>23</sup> In some cases this was to add information to what I had already acquired, and in other cases to shed light on a topic on which the particular informant had significant knowledge. At the same time, I strived to acquire several informants from the same institution or organization, so that the information to some extent could be triangulated (Yin, 2009: 116).

The internal validity of a case study is strengthened by the researcher's immersion into the context of the case, and deeper understanding of the field (Ryen, 2002: 178-179). Having spent a lot of time in Egypt, my understanding of the context has strengthened. However, as the intensity of a study increases, the personal qualifications of the researcher may also serve to limit the understanding of data. In this case, my understanding of the Egyptian context is limited by my scarce Arabic vocabulary. This inhibits the interpretation of interview data, where I largely

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<sup>22</sup> I will refer to some direct personal observations in the analysis, but these observations constitute a small part of the total amount of data.

<sup>23</sup> I include a general interview guide in the appendix.

depend on a translator, and the understanding of observations in the field and newspapers (Ryen, 2002: 107). An interview is also affected by non-verbal communication, such as clothing and appearance (Ryen, 2002) My appearance as a western student can therefore be considered to have an impact on how the informants answered my questions.

### ***Previous research***

A significant portion of the data that is used is drawn from previous research, especially in the analysis of the two first time periods. Most of this research is peer-reviewed. However, as Yin emphasizes, sources should always be triangulated (2009: 116). This is not always achievable in this thesis because the recent history of Copts is poorly documented. The analysis at times relies only on one source for certain statements. This is amended by the use of interview data to the extent possible.

### ***The minorities at risk data set***

The 2009 version of the MAR dataset that was employed in this chapter data from 2004 to 2006. The MAR datasets track 283 politically active groups (*VMAR\_Group*), selected on the criteria that the group (1) “collectively suffers, or benefits from, discriminatory treatment vis-à-vis other groups in a society” and (2) “is the basis for political mobilization and collective action in defense or promotion of its self-defined interests” (Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 2009: web). The previous dataset versions have been accused of selection bias, i.e. including only groups that are contentious (Minorities at Risk project, 2009a: 2-3). The latest version has corrected this by adding more groups. This is visible in figure 3 above, where a large number of cases cluster at the bottom of the scatter-plot, due to the absence of collective action. I used the three variables of the Minorities at Risk dataset in the above sections about case selection: Protest (*PROT*), Rebellion (*REB*), Region (*VMAR\_Region*) and Group proportion of country population (*GPRO*), described in table 4 in appendix.

## **4.7 Strategy of analysis**

To lend sufficient focus to the variables and indicators, I assign one chapter to each variable. Each chapter begins by answering the main question of the variable in three subsequent subchapters that resemble the time periods. The intent here is to give a detailed description of how the variable affects or do not affect movement development. At the end of each chapter I present the results for the indicators of the given variable for all three time periods. In chapter



seven however, I address the indicators directly, because of the topical nature of frame analysis. Finally, in Chapter 8 I draw the long historical lines, and attempt to shed light on the interaction of variables across time.

#### **4.8 Method summary**

The Coptic communal group can be identified as a typical case in the relationship between group size and level of collective action in the MENA. This increases the likelihood that inferences from this analysis have significance for other communal groups in the MENA. The primary purpose of the thesis is however to provide an accurate explanation of a phenomenon. To do this the analysis will use the MSSD to compare Coptic collective action over three time periods, where the dependent variable, movement development, varies between the time periods. This is combined with within-case analysis of the time periods to mediate the problems of possible overdetermination and equifinality.

The next chapter begins the analysis of the thesis by discussing the changes in political opportunity structure from 1981 to 2012.

### **5. Changes in political opportunity structure**

This chapter poses the overall question of how changes in political context lead to specific opportunities available to the Coptic collective action. As such, the chapter is dense in descriptive historical information about political institutions and organizations. It is well known that the 2011 uprising gave birth to regime change as well as other significant political changes. However, there are several other political events and changes in recent history that just as much has affected the contentious politics of the Coptic communal group. In the analysis below, I identify state-level clientelism, and the rise of political Islam as two of those factors.

#### **5.1 Opportunity structures 1981-2001**

This section (5.1) of the opportunity analysis is marked by the absence of Coptic collective action from 1981-2001. It is difficult to trace specific incidents that potentially could have led to a demonstration or some other form of collective action, and how these incidents were stopped from developing. Thereby, the within-case analysis here describes those factors that theoretically inhibit contentious collective action, and draws connections between these constraints and the Coptic communal group. The most important task of the first time period is to be a foundation for comparison for the later time periods, when Coptic collective action started to occur.

The time period was marked by a Church who desperately needed to strengthen the relationship with the regime after the duration of open conflict between the President and the Pope under Sadat's presidency (Sedra, 1999). The Pope succeeded in improving Church-state relations, but at the cost of the influence of other Coptic actors. The authoritarian regime in Egypt severely limited the opportunities for any kind of opposition. In 1981 president Anwar Sadat was shot by Islamic fundamentalists, and his vice-president Hosni Mubarak came to power. At the moment, few Egyptians imagined that he would be the longest sitting Egyptian ruler in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Soliman, 2011: xiii).

During the last 30 years the Egyptian political system has proven its clear concentration of power in the executive branch (Soliman, 2011; Owen, 1999; Springborg, 1989). While Egypt has had staged elections, the president served a six-year term that was indefinitely renewable. The president could remove the prime minister and the council of ministers, dissolve the parliament, veto all bills, and bypass the parliament by putting issues to vote in referenda. Most of the time the president's party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), controlled around three-quarters of the seats in the People's Assembly (the lower house – Majlis al-Sha'ab), and the president appointed all governors, mayors, and deputy mayors. He also appointed a third of the members in the consultative assembly (the upper house – Majlis al-Shura), and ten members of the People's Assembly. Through gerrymandering, a winner-take-all system, and extensive corruption the NDP ensured a monopoly also in the elected local councils (Lesch, 2012: 18-19). Mubarak's electoral law of 1984 consciously created a system where the NDP would receive any possible advantage, limiting opposition in the People's Assembly to a minimum. The limit for minimum percentage of votes for any party was set at eight percent, with the votes of those parties not passing the threshold transferred to the largest party. Coalitions of parties that could have reached the necessary minimum were banned in an ad-hoc fashion (Owen, 1999: 186).

The president was further empowered by the constant state of emergency. This authorized him to restrain movement, search people and their homes without warrant, wiretap phones, censor the media, forbid meetings, and intern suspects without trials. To muster more than five people on the street was illegal, and civilians were regularly referred to "Emergency State Security courts" and military courts. Officers served as judges, and the courts had no appeal process (Lesch, 2012: 19).

Copts were poorly represented in Mubarak's regime. Since the Nasserist revolution in 1952 the ruling elite has for the most part consisted of military officers-turned-politicians and their personal networks. None of these networks has included a substantial number of Copts (Elsässer, 2011: 98). To sustain the regime's legitimacy, public jobs were distributed to a large proportion of the Egyptian population. In 1986, 35 percent of the workforce was on the public payroll (Springborg, 1989: 137). The Copts have, however, not traditionally occupied public sector positions, possibly as a result of systematic discrimination (Pennington, 1982).<sup>24</sup> It is also quite clear that few Copts traditionally have occupied the upper echelons of the administrative hierarchy. One should caution that anticipation of discrimination may also have affected the career choices of young Copts. Therefore, it is uncertain whether one can rightfully blame the absence of Copts in high positions in the public sector solely on discriminatory practice (Elsässer, 2011: 97).

Robert Springborg, writing at the end of the eighties describes Mubarak as a man without ambition. He had no clear ideological goals or political platform. This distinguished him from his predecessors, whose policies had earned them, if not outright legitimacy, at least large bases of support in Egyptian society. Springborg notes that Mubarak initially did not inherit the client cluster that Sadat created. Sadat's *infitah* ("opening" of the economy and politics) had largely led to a privatization of patronage, because of the creation of a new bourgeoisie built on private business. (Springborg, 1989: 19-36). After a while however, the *infitah* class were given important positions in Mubarak's patronage network. Alliances were secured by handing out parliamentary seats. This provided the clients with immunity from the law, public procurement contracts, and credit from state banks (Soliman, 2011). The Coptic business class was involved in this network (Elsässer, 2011: 103). The price for a client relationship is paid in loyalty to the regime. The Coptic upper class was thereby inhibited from contributing resources to the voicing of Coptic grievances, and Coptic challengers would have a hard time finding allies in the economic elite (Sedra, 1999).

Another ruling tactic of the Mubarak regime was the absolute control of elections, visible in the elections in 1984, 1987, and 1990. Mubarak's methods to ensure electoral victories included the use of government agents to interfere in election procedures, manufactured

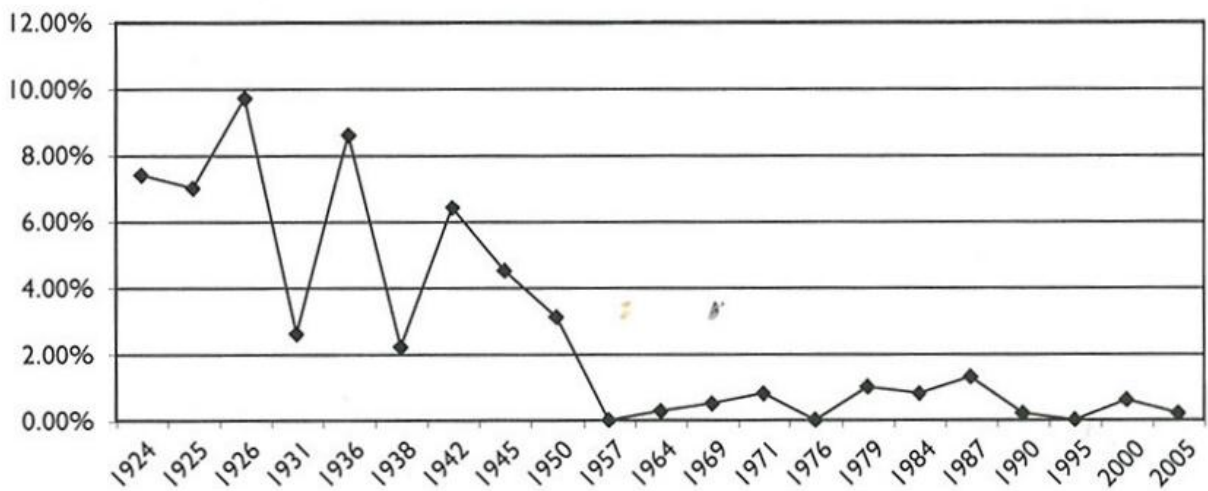
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<sup>24</sup> That discrimination is the case has frequently been claimed by Copts, and several studies have found evidence suggesting that the regime consciously reduced Coptic presence in several sectors of public employment (Pennington, 1982).

opposition parties, hand-picking supporters to the electoral lists, using the state apparatus to support the government party, and excluding opposition candidates from the legislative process if they were elected (Owen, 1999: 186-189). However, even though the electoral process was unfair, quite a number of opposition parties did contest in the People’s Assembly elections in the 1980s. These parties had their own newspapers, and encouraged public debate over political issues (Sedra, 1999: 231). Accordingly, the time around the elections contributed to a somewhat liberal atmosphere.

Yet, the regime’s control over the elections inhibited the opportunities for access to the institutional political system. This made it hard for all potential activists to obtain allies within the political system. At the same time, the proportion of Christians in parliament was low throughout the period. Figure 4 below illustrates the decline of Coptic representation in Parliament after the coup of 1952.

**Figure 4) Percentage of Christians in Parliament 1924-2005**



*Source: Soliman (2009: 138)*

The Christian representation in parliament between 1982 and 2001 varied between zero and 1.5 percent.<sup>25</sup> Considering that a 1996 census estimated the proportion of Christians to six percent (Delhaye, 2012: 71), the representation is disproportional to the number of Copts in the Egyptian population, further under representing the Copts in Egypt’s elite. Considering that there is no occurrence of contentious action in this period, underrepresentation in parliament does not seem to cause Coptic collective action on the short term.

<sup>25</sup> Soliman does not mention the exact denomination of the parliamentarians (e.g. “Coptic Orthodox” or “Catholic”)

This limited representation inhibited potential Coptic and secular challengers because of the clear lack of representatives who could work as potential allies. The limited number of Copts in the NDP made it difficult to change this situation, even if they could gather enough voters to push a Copt into parliament. Additionally to the low number of Coptic representatives, those politicians that had seats had little importance (Sedra, 1999). As was briefly discussed in the background chapter, the president has used his right to appoint ten parliamentarians after every election to ensure a representation of Copts. As such, the Coptic parliamentarians often owed their positions to both the Coptic Patriarch and the President, conditioning their behavior. Even if these representatives had some influence on the political matters discussed in the People's Assembly, one must also take into consideration that the Egyptian republican regime vested supreme political authority in the executive, rendering the legislature a mere rubber stamp institution.

On the other hand, there has also been Coptic representation in the executive. Since 1952 there has been an established consensus that at least one cabinet minister should be Christian. More Christians have also been added to the Cabinets as they expanded over the years. Yet, similarly to the Copts in parliament, the ministers had limited influence, as they were typically technocrats with little independent political weight. Copts also had generally few members in the National Democratic Party (Elsässer, 2011: 99).<sup>26</sup> Consequently, as the President sought to appoint representatives only with papal approval (Soliman, 2009: 139), this was a point in history when the Church was assigned a new form of political authority. If the Coptic political representatives had little to no influence, the Church was the only entity that could claim to represent the Copts.<sup>27</sup>

Under previous president Anwar Sadat the relationship between the Church and the regime had been rather cold. In the 1970s Patriarch Shenouda had himself been an instigator of contentious action. In 1972, 90 clergymen and 400 laymen gathered in front of a Church in Khanka on the order of Pope Shenouda (Sedra, 1999: 226). As such, he indicated that he was willing to take on the role as a leader of the Coptic political community. Not many years later, Shenouda was exiled to a rural monastery after an open confrontation with Sadat. Sadat famously stated "I am a Muslim president of a Muslim state" (Soliman, 2009: 137), and accused the

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<sup>26</sup> According to Elsässer (2011:99) no substantial research has been done on the issue of Coptic membership in the National Democratic Party or the other regime parties that has existed since 1952.

<sup>27</sup> Sedra cites several other politicians as well

Church for trying to establish “a state within the state”. This rhetoric was part of Sadat’s strategy to appeal to the Muslim masses for legitimacy. This strategy was upsetting to Copts, feeling threatened by the possible open door to uncompromising Islamism, and a further Islamization of Egyptian public space. Informant 12 elaborates on his first encounter with imprisoned Clergy in 1981. He describes one event as a critical moment in forming his coming close relationship with the Church:

“In 1981 Father, Yosef Asad from my local Church was imprisoned together with 23 fathers and eight bishops. This was during Sadat. The pope was exiled to the monastery of Saint Bishoy, and that time was the beginning of my service with the Church. We had to prepare food for the fathers in prison, and pack it. The person responsible for taking the food to the fathers was not there, so I took the food to them in prison” (Informant 12, 2012).

When Shenouda was in house arrest, he reconsidered his approach to leadership, and decided to model his relationship with the regime after that of his predecessor – Pope Kirolos – who had engaged in a millet-partnership with the President. When it became clear that Mubarak would be the new president, Shenouda dispatched two bishops to the United States to calm down the Coptic diaspora, who was furious over Shenouda’s detention. Shenouda sent them a message to greet Mubarak with prayers, not demonstrations (Sedra, 1999: 227). Four years after Mubarak’s inauguration, Shenouda was liberated, and from thereon “kept the Copts in his pocket, and Mubarak ... kept Shenouda in his pocket” (Hanna, 1996 cited in Sedra, 1999: 227). This alliance provided benefits for both parties. Mubarak provided Shenouda with church construction permits and other resources that the Pope could distribute among the dioceses, while Mubarak could feel secure that the Church would embrace the rhetoric of the regime, and avoid public confrontation. The alignment of regime and church, considered as an elite alignment, worked against Coptic collective action, and especially secular collective action, because of the major authority of the Coptic Church at the time. The Church-regime alignment meant that the Coptic Church would be expected to control the Christians, especially preventing collective action. The reach of the Church into nearly all spheres of life will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 6.

The improvement of the relationship between Church and state should be seen in relation to the regime’s new confrontational attitude towards political Islam (Elsässer, 2011: 107). One of the dominant aspects of Egyptian politics in the first two decades of Mubarak’s rule was the struggle between the regime and the Islamist opposition. The Islamist opposition was divided in one moderate and one radical wing, the former dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood (Gama’at

al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin), and the latter by “al-Gamaat al-Islamiya”, and “al-Gihad” (responsible for the assassination of former president Anwar Sadat). The radical wing drew followers from students and the urban poor, as well as certain places in Upper Egypt and the urban peripheries. They were smaller in numbers than their moderate counterparts, but drew attention due to their acts of political violence. The regime countered the radicals by harsh repression, as well as propaganda, while the moderates were subject to mild harassment, and softer tactics. This stood in contrast to the policies of Sadat, who allied himself with the Islamists, partly by releasing hundreds of Brotherhood members who were imprisoned during President Nasser (Elsässer, 2011: 107; Schwedler, 2010: 128).

At its peak, the Islamic current in Egypt was termed the “largest and most heterogeneous in the entire Arab Middle East” (Krämer, 1999: 210). The current grew so large that only exceptional groups of society were not involved in it; industrial workers, peasants and the Copts. The violence of the radical groups in the 1990s began with attacks on tourists and police during the fall 1992. By April 1993, the government had detained 30-40,000 suspected Muslim militants, and an unknown number were killed by security forces. The political violence peaked in 1997 with a massacre in The Valley of the Kings, claiming the lives of 58 tourists and four Egyptians, in addition to the perpetrators of the attack (Schwedler, 2010: 128; Bayat, 1998: 155; Owen, 1999: 198). The wave of violence also took its toll of the Coptic community. Attacks directed at the Copts claimed more than a dozen casualties each year between 1991 and 1993 (Elsässer, 2011: 108). These violent actions by the Islamic militants were only one of the two faces of the strengthening Islamic current. The other was the voluntary efforts in education and social work. The brotherhood drew on resources from a wide network of banks, mosques, schools, clinics and companies, and used these to build support. They established themselves in university campuses, urban neighborhoods, among middle class professionals, and importantly: in Egypt’s professional associations (Krämer, 1999: 210-213; Wickham, 2002: 178). In a process termed “party squatting” by Iman Farag (cited in Krämer, 1999: 213), weak secular and political parties were more or less taken over by members of the Gamaat and the Brotherhood. Informant 13, a political analyst at Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, argues that the Muslim Brotherhood today benefits from the political experience that they started acquiring in the 1980s and gradually built up over the years. The brotherhood won seats running as Wafd

Party candidates in 1984 and as Labor Party candidates in 1987 (Wickham, 2002: 92).<sup>28</sup> According to Informant 13, this was a conscious strategy from the beginning on the part of the regime. The NDP wanted to be the “liberal secular alternative”, and thus marginalized the liberal secular opposition, while the brotherhood was allowed more space (Informant 13, 2013). Accordingly the potential for mobilizing around a secular ideology was difficult. On the one hand the NDP had adopted the label of “liberal secular”, and on the other hand the few parties that traditionally were part of the liberal secular opposition was occupied by Islamists.

Through the 80s and 90s the state had various responses to the invigorating Islamist current. In less sensitive political areas the regime would make concessions, such as in matters of religious teaching in schools, allowing Islamic preaching on TV and radio, as well as Islamic newspapers, and banning alcohol in certain spaces. The regime would at times see to it that ‘anti-Islamic’ books were confiscated, and their authors put on trial. However, the NDP did put its foot down in the area of law and order, as attempts to codify sharia into applicable laws were blocked. In order to carry out the ruthless persecution of the militants, the regime extended the emergency law that was first put imposed by Sadat in 1981 (Krämer, 1999: 213-214). As such, the regime balanced between hunting militant Islamists and giving piecemeal victories to political Islamism.

Vis-à-vis the government effort to curb the Islamist opposition, the Church-regime relation improved, and the time after pope Shenouda’s reinstatement in 1985 was particularly marked by the cooperation between the Pope and the President and their offices. The Pope had an inner circle of bishops whom he trusted with political affairs, dubbed the “private inner cabinet” by Sana Hassan (cited in Elsässer, 2011: 108). The relations with the state were handled exclusively by these clergymen from that point onwards. Bishop Matta al-Miskin, an opponent of Shenouda in the 1970s, was isolated, and the upper class Copts were marginalized, excluded from the negotiation of Coptic issues and complaints with state executives. The Pope and his cabinet gained access to government members, and could for example consult the Minister of the Interior directly on the matter of criminal attacks against the Copts. The regional level bishops would develop relations with provincial governors and security officials to protect the Copts of their dioceses. Efforts to promote dialogue between the Church and Muslim State officials were also

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<sup>28</sup> Wickham (2002) shows on page 92 how the Wafd and the Labor Party had the largest share of the opposition votes in those elections where the Muslim Brotherhood was running for them.



intensified. Hence, the Church made use of its strengthened position to provide for the protection of the Coptic community (Elsässer, 2011: 108).

Parallel to the reforging of the Church-State alliance, Egyptian class divisions started to impact the opportunities for Coptic collective action. The infitah bourgeoisie that rose under Sadat was dependent on their business network and regime patrons to keep their position, and therefore opted out of the struggle for Coptic rights. The Egyptian middle class Copts therefore stood alone in their aspirations to improve the situation of the Copts independent from the Church (Sedra, 1999: 227-228). The Islamist current had naturally deepened the religious lines of demarcation between Muslims and Christians. In addition came the restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly as a consequence of the actions by Islamic militants, and the government response. The overall confidence in the role of legal opposition was effectively undermined (Owen, 1999: 198; Tadros, 2012: 91). As such, the mid-90s was an absolute dead point in terms of opportunities for public collective action, perhaps especially for the Copts.

While many members of the Coptic middle class may have wanted to influence politics by influencing the Clergy, this alternative was blocked for most of them. The principal channel for such influence is the elections for the Coptic Orthodox Lay Council, whose committees deal with issues such as religious endowments, legal affairs and construction. However, the Council bylaws prescribe strict voter eligibility requirements, demanding that the voter must have a secondary school certificate and own land, or business, or be employed in the civil service with a certain amount of monthly salary. Additionally, the Clergy interfered in the council elections by issuing lists of sanctioned candidates, and threatening voters. The electoral turnout in the Council elections of 1990 and 1995 was very low, even when considering the restricted electorate (Sedra, 1999).<sup>29</sup> Writing in 1999, Paul Sedra considered the situation the following way:

“Given the Mubarak-Shenouda partnership and the authoritarian structure of government bequeathed by Nasser and Sadat, there exists no secular leadership of the Coptic community untainted by complicity with the government – no independent voice willing and able to voice Copt’s grievances” (Sedra, 1999: 229).

Considering this status at the end of the 1999, there are no indicators that predict the initiation of collective action only two years later. Sedra here refers to secular leadership, and it is clear that

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<sup>29</sup> 1990: 1200 registered to vote, of which 750 voted  
1995: 4000 registered to vote, of which 3000 voted

the demonstrations that were to occur in the aftermath of the defaming of the Coptic Church in “al-Nabaa” were not secular in nature. Rather, it was clear that the Al-Nabaa demonstrations was a defense of the Church and the community overall, against the Muslim preachers and journalists who attacked Christians through the media (Soliman, 2009: 143).

## **5.2 Political opportunity in the 2000s**

2001 saw the first Coptic protests since the 1970s, against a newspaper article that brought disgrace upon their Church and religion. The demonstrations were not appreciated by Shenouda, and he publicly pleaded the demonstrators to remain calm (Soliman, 2009). The al-Nabaa demonstrations were contemporary with the start-up of demonstrations support of the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 and 2001. These led to an increased tolerance of collective action in the Egyptian public space (Iskander, 2012: 38; Shehata, 2012). Neither the al-Nabaa nor the Intifada demonstrations were directed at the Egyptian state, which probably encouraged the regime to let them slip through. It has been indicated that in order to let contentious segments of society “blow steam”, the regime tolerated some protest against foreign “targets”, such as Israel and Iraq war (Brown and Shahin, 2010).

Gamaat al-Islamiya announced their initiative to end violence in 1999 and began a conversion towards an NGO in the early 2000s (Meljer, 2011: 159-160). In year 2000 Gerges regarded the Islamist insurgency as “eliminated”(Gerges, 2000: 595). This led to a generally safer public space and less edgy security forces. Accordingly the new decade seemed to start out with a lesser propensity for repression by the Egyptian regime. One should note that while the propensity for repression might have sunk for *some* instances of collective action, the capacity for repression was on the rise. Mubarak had from the late 1990s developed a highly sophisticated anti-riot security force, employing plain-clothes thugs to disperse and abuse protesters (Springborg, 2009).

The next large incident of Coptic collective action happened in 2004, when thousands of Copts gathered outside the cathedral in Abassia. They demonstrated against the alleged abduction of a Coptic woman by “Muslim fanatics”. The incident was a typical example of a “kidnapping and conversion” controversy, which frequently spurs sectarian strife in Egypt (see Mahmood 2012, and Chapter 7). The woman was the wife of a priest, but had left him and attempted to convert to Islam to get the marriage annulled. Police were present, although at an unknown scale. The demonstrators and the police are reported to have thrown rocks at each other (Soliman, 2009:

144), but the sophisticated security apparatus described above seem not to have been fully deployed. Partly, the security forces were the targets of the protests, as they were believed to have knowledge about the whereabouts of the woman, but refused to reveal this. The local priests tried to calm down the protests, but at little use. After a while, the central Church stepped in, and demanded its right to meet the women for a council meeting. On the orders of Mubarak the police gave the Church access to the woman, after which she was “released”, and moved to a monastery (Soliman, 2009: 144-145). As such, the Church eventually acted as an ally of the activists, and used its influence over the regime to fulfill the goals of the demonstrations.

In April 2006 in Alexandria, Copts again publicly demonstrated against the government, accusing them of being complicit in attacks against Christians. The demonstration took place after a funeral, and the protesters carried the coffin with the victim of an Islamist attack. Once again the local priest tried to prevent the contentiousness, but failed. The demonstration provoked by-standing Muslims, and violence erupted between them and the Copts. This led security forces to arrive and form a line between them. The event was followed by the destruction of Christian homes and businesses (Soliman, 2009: 146).

An observation about this last example is that collective action is not so much repressed by the state, as it is by other citizens. This emphasizes the point made in section 5.1, that an unsafe public space inhibits collective action. What the three examples above have in common, that reoccurs in the events of Coptic collective action in this period, is that they are driven by sectarian tension; the defaming of the Coptic Church by Muslims, the kidnapping of a woman by Muslims, and an attack by Muslims. As such, the collective action in this period was essentially pitting the Copts and Muslims against each other. While the first and the last example saw no intervention by the Church, the “kidnapping-example” showed that the Church was willing to step into a role as mediator. These incidents thus demonstrate a collective action that is purely confessional, and not secular.

The Egyptian parliamentary and presidential elections in 2005 were preceded by a period of political liberalization, and were less manipulated than previous elections (Elsässer, 2010). Mubarak announced in February that general elections would be held for the presidency, and that more than one candidate would be allowed to run. Previously the Egyptian president had been elected by the parliament, and afterwards elected by the people by a yes or no vote (Meital, 2006). Regardless of this liberalization, few Christians were elected (or appointed) for parliament

in 2005, as visible in figure 4. To win electoral support, the candidates for parliament mobilized on the basis of religion. An example can be drawn from the election campaign in Minya, where a Copt ran for the Tagammu Party against two Muslim candidates from the NDP and the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood candidate had the following rallying cry: “Do not give your vote to the church candidate, give it to the mosque candidate” (Tadros, 2012: 88). The Church supported the NDP-candidates, regardless of the religious affiliation of their adversaries (Tadros, 2012), and despite that only two of the 444 NDP candidates were Copts (Elsässer, 2011: 99). Additionally, Pope Shenouda went out with public support of president Mubarak in the Church publication *al-Keraza*, reaffirming the alliance between Shenouda and Mubarak (Iskander, 2012: 81). As such, despite some liberalization of electoral politics, the Church-regime alignment and the difficulty of voting Copts into parliament continued to inhibit representation that really mattered.

The 2005 election turned out as a significant victory for the Muslim Brotherhood. By running as independent candidates they acquired 87 seats, about 19 percent of the People’s assembly (Schwedler, 2010: 125). Accordingly, a central part of the opportunity structure, the number of Copts in parliament, remained unchanged from the previous decade. In addition they were now accompanied by Muslim Brotherhood representatives. The representatives that *were* Copts also continued to show unwillingness to prioritize Coptic concerns (McCallum, 2007: 926).

Towards the end of the 2000s, there began to appear cracks in the Church-state pact. This became visible in the Camilia Shehata-incident, another conversion case, in July 2010. This time the state intervened quickly to locate and retrieve to the Church the allegedly kidnapped woman, to be kept in the Church’s custody (Iskander, 2012: 156). This act spurred widespread protests by the Muslim community, who wanted the woman back. Despite several calls from Shenouda for the regime to intervene, the state security forces did not step in to disperse or calm the protests. Incitements from both secretary of the Holy Synod, Anba Beshoy, as well as Salafist satellite channels contributed to drive up the protests.<sup>30</sup> The government chose to shut down the satellite channels, but not to intervene on the streets. Pope Shenouda had to cancel a public speech in Alexandria because of the contentiousness. Protests were also held outside mosques that were

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<sup>30</sup> The Holy Synod is the highest authority of the Egyptian Orthodox Church, and consists of a council of bishops, chaired by the pope (Kamil, 1987). The Salafists are considered to hold more conservative views than most Egyptians. The Salafi current calls for the subordination of non-Muslims in an Islamic system (Elsässer, 2011: 259).

considered mainstream (not considered Salafist-dominated) such as the Masji al-Nour mosque. This mosque is connected to Al-Azhar, and therefore considered state-ground. That the protests were still allowed to go on is an indicator of the acceptance of the state of using its ground for sectarian incitement (Iskander, 2012: 157).

Accordingly, Pope Shenouda was sacrificed by the government as a scapegoat, saving the state from negative attention. The October issue of the Church magazine Al-Keraza spent much space trying to convince the President of intervening, including a joint statement by the Sheikh of al-Azhar and the Pope, praising Mubarak, and calling for national unity (Iskander, 2012: 158-159). When a dispute over a Church construction in Giza turned into Coptic protests in November, the protests were believed to have the endorsement of the Pope. Shenouda expressed anger with the state security services during a sermon. In the parliamentary elections of 2010 Shenouda was believed to have cast his vote for the Wafd party, not the NDP, breaching with his previously firm support of the President's party. Furthermore, leaders of all the Christian denominations in Egypt endorsed the 2010 report on religious freedom by the U.S. state department. Previous issues of this report, always critical of the situation for Christians in Egypt, had been met with derision (Iskander, 2012: 159).

### **5.3 Political opportunity 2011-2013**

The 25 January uprising happened in the year for scheduled presidential elections. The two only likely candidates were the same old Hosni Mubarak, and his son, Gamal Mubarak. The uprising also took place directly after heavily rigged parliamentary elections. The demonstrations were attempted quelled by heavy-handed security forces. However, images of violent riot police only increased the sympathy for the protesters, and accordingly also their numbers. The political elite hesitated to come up with a solution and the failure by the security forces lead to a rift between the president and the minister of interior. Mubarak thereby ordered the military on to the streets. However, the military generals were unsure about their position in the conflict, and eventually decided not to fire on the people. The rest of the political elite of the regime eroded, as they were either sacked or chose to jump ship.

These were the most vital changes in opportunity structures for the emergence and continuation of the national 2011 uprising (Korany and El-Mahdi, 2012: 11-12). Mubarak stepped down on 11 February, handing over power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). While at first welcomed by the people, the SCAF after a while turned out to be acting

primarily out of self-interest, securing its privileged position in the post-revolutionary setting. They employed the emergency law to justify strict control of public space, and sought to implement constitutional principles that would safe-guard the armed forces from public insight (Kandil, 2012; Salt, 2012) . While the downfall of Mubarak meant one thing for most Egyptians, it meant something else for the Copts. While there had been dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of the regime to Coptic grievances, the Copts knew what they had, but not what they would get. Their fears were to be confirmed in November, when the Islamist bloc won a clear majority in parliament (Salt, 2012).

In March 2011, Copts started to gather outside the Maspero building, which is the site of the Radio and Television Union. They objected to the SCAF's failure to prosecute Church attackers in the time after 25 January (Sedra, 2012). The Patriarch opposed, and one final call from the Patriarch for the breakup of Coptic protests came on 15 May 2011. However, the day after he drew back his statement and said that he could not impose any more pressure, and that protestors' demands were justifiable (Iskander, 2012: 168-169). The Maspero demonstrations continued throughout the summer and fall of 2011. It is worth noting that while the activists there were primarily youth, the Maspero demonstrations were marked by the presence of several clergymen. Mityas Nasr and Filobater Gamil Aziz, two Cairene priests, played the role as mediators between the central Church and the activists, and worked for collaboration between the youth and the clergy that was present at the demonstrations (Bland, 2012). According to Bland (2012: 44-45), Filobater later on was later pressured to leave Egypt due to his role in the demonstrations. Furthermore, Informant 12 (2012) says he was motivated to go to Maspero by Bishop Theodossious, and that he was the first who encouraged all Christians to participate. Maspero was also frequented by Naguib Sawiris, a Coptic business tycoon, who issued his support to activists. The famous Coptic diaspora blogger and regime critic Michael Mounir was also present (Informant 12, 2012). Such support across the community was unprecedented. Clearly, collective actors now saw a moment of opportunity to forge new alliances, and grow in size. However, the Maspero gathering was also soon about to face the unprecedented state repression.

The armed forces took over with popular support and goodwill from the Egyptian people. Yet, only two days after the takeover, the SCAF suspended both the parliament and the constitution. They thereafter proposed nine constitutional amendments, passed in a referendum

on 19 March with 77 percent support. The amendments stipulated that parliamentary elections were to be held, and that the new parliament would form a constituent assembly. The SCAF resumed its control over the executive, with a newly formed “defense council” which had the same powers as those of the president (Maswood and Natarajan, 2012: 240). The provisions of the emergency law continued to operate and were applied to curb the continuation of the uprising. On 4 October the SCAF announced that the emergency law would be in place until May 2012. “Stability” had to be restored before lifting it. On 9 October the armed forces attacked the Maspero demonstrations. The military deployed tear gas, armored vehicles, and live bullets to disperse the protesters. The images of armored personnel carriers running over and crushing Christian protesters were broadcasted worldwide (Tadros, 2011). At least 27 people died, more than 300 were injured, and the incident has later been referred to as the “Maspero massacre” (Iskander, 2012: 166-167).

These facts denote that the propensity for repression towards Coptic protests did not decrease with the transition to a new government. On the contrary, the Maspero massacre constituted the single most fatal instance of repression covered by the time scope of this thesis. It is further clear that the alignment of church and regime was either not working or done away with. The Church had not managed to contain Coptic collective action, and the regime had failed to protect the Copts. Efforts were made shortly after the massacre to reconstitute the Church-regime relationship. SCAF and Church representatives met during the week following the incident, and negotiated an investigation of the massacre, and discussed other Coptic grievances. Pope Shenouda accepted that the military would be in charge of the investigation, and advised Coptic activists to do the same (Iskander, 2012: 167). The Maspero massacre was however soon overshadowed by national political events.

Parliamentary elections for the lower house were held from 28 November 2011 to 11 January 2012. The Carter Center concluded: “the results appear to be a broadly accurate expression of the will of the voters” (The Carter Center, 2012: web). The Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party gained 47 percent of the seats, and by joining forces with the Salafist Nour Party (24 percent of the seats) constituted an Islamic party majority in the People’s Assembly (Reuters, 2012). The total number of Copts in the new assembly, including those appointed by SCAF in its role as executive, was 13 out of a total 508 (2.5 percent) (Freedom House, 2013). The Egypt Bloc (Egyptian Social Democratic Party and Free Egyptians Party)

probably drew most of the Coptic votes (Informant 13, 2013), and won nearly seven percent of the seats.<sup>31</sup> They emphasize a “Civil State”, an expression that has replaced the more controversial “secular state”.<sup>32</sup> This means that they accept Islam as an official religion and main source of legislation, but opposes “exploitation of religion for political purposes” and the transformation of Egypt into an Islamic state (Carnegie Endowment, 2011: web).

The Islamic parties’ victory in the parliamentary elections was followed by Muslim Brother Mohamed Morsi’s victory in the presidential elections in June. In the final round he was running against a former prime minister in Mubarak’s government, Ahmed Shafiq. According to most of my informants most Copts voted for Shafiq. Many news-outlets also speculated that Shafiq drew most of the Coptic voter bloc because he managed to play on their fear for the consequences of an Islamist government (Elshayyal, 2012; Labib, 2012). Informant 12, a Church volunteer in the upper class district of Zamalek, asserted that the local church’s political committee advised the congregation to vote for Shafiq. He said that the committee advised people to vote for candidate Amr Moussa (candidate in the first round) at first, but changed their standing to Shafiq when most congregation members expressed negative feelings against Moussa. These political committees will be further discussed in the next chapter.

This total shift in political landscape has significance for Coptic collective action, and the Coptic secular movement specifically. Now that the NDP was dissolved, it could no longer claim monopoly on the liberal and secular party platform. This opened the opportunities for Coptic participation in the new opposition parties, a change from the Islamist-dominated opposition before 2011. Casting your vote therefore meant more than it had ever done for the Copts in the 2011-2012 elections. Furthermore, the new liberal and secular parties posed as likely allies for Coptic activists. Partly, the function of the Church-regime alignment in the past had been to influence the government to contain the Islamist movements in society, and the strike down on Islamic attacks on Christians. Now that the Islamists themselves were in power, this alliance no longer made sense.

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<sup>31</sup> The Social Democratic Party was founded shortly after the uprising, by Samer Soliman (much cited in this thesis) and other members of both the Christian and Muslim intelligentsia (Informant 13, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> In an interview with the leadership of the Free Egyptians Party, Informant 4 told me that he saw the civil state as an antonym to the “barbaric state”. According to him, European countries were civil states, while Egypt was still barbaric. As such, he associated “civil” with the transformation of society as a whole. It would therefore be fair to assume that there is some confusion around these terms, where people, even within the parties, have different connotations to the concepts of “civil” and “secular”. See also Iskander, (2012: 177-179) and



In March 2012, five months after the Maspero massacre, Pope Shenouda passed away, and a new pope was elected and inaugurated by November that year.<sup>33</sup> When a new pope is to be instated, his entire staff is also changed, and positions in the upper clergy are reshuffled according to the wishes of the new Pope (Guirguis, 2012).<sup>34</sup> The new Patriarch Tawadros was in many ways different from his predecessor. Soon after his instatement, statements came out from the upper Clergy that set a new tone for Church-regime relations (Al Jazeera, 2012). In practice, this was illustrated with the withdrawal of Church representatives from the constitutional assembly, refusing to cooperate with the new government (Informant 3, 2012a; Egypt Independent, 2012), as well as the new Patriarch's public criticism of the government (Associated Press, 2013).

The constitutional assembly had been elected by parliament in June 2012. It was found illegitimate of by the Egyptian bloc, as it consisted of a hundred members, of which 66 were Islamists. Facing the risk of the assembly being dissolved, Morsi issued a decree that put presidential decisions above judicial review in November. This was sure to block the influence of the constitutional assembly, which had dissolved the previous constitutional assembly (Freedom House, 2013). This decree ensured Islamist dominance in the assembly, and accordingly blocked a stronger liberal or secular influence.

The MYU in cooperation with the opposition mobilized across Cairo to object to the decree. They refuted that the Church should be the only representative of Christians in the assembly. This is one of the signs that Muslim Brotherhood ultimately wants to deal with the Copts through the Church.. Informant 13 asserts that the Muslim Brotherhood has attempted to pull the Church and the new pope back into a political role: "They are trying to attract the Church again to play politics. But I know very well, personally, that the Pope does not want that." Furthermore, informants within the Coptic political and economic elite assert that they are about to take back their role as political leaders of the community:

And you know that during the 80s there was the terrorist in Egypt, and it extended until the 90s, and it was very high pressure among the Christians. This put load over the pope and the priests to take over, to get involved within the political problems Until the Shenouda pope has died last year ... So, any type of religious face was not accepted ... by the political people to speak on behalf of

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<sup>33</sup> Bishop Tawadros was enthroned as Egypt's 118<sup>th</sup> pope on 18 November 2012.

<sup>34</sup> This is a result of the bylaws issued by Shenouda after his return from exile; see article 52: "The pope has the right to choose the bishops who help him in the ministry and to illustrate their duties and responsibilities" (Guirguis, 2012: web)

the people ... So we took over, to start to speak and to make uniting between people who are interested in the politics, to take out the role of the priests and the bishops. To speak on behalf of the Christians” (Informant 15, 2013).

The informant speaking in this interview is a resourceful Christian and member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party.

During my fieldwork in Cairo in November 2012, I observed firsthand the collaboration of the new secular parties and the Maspero Youth Union. In large protest marches that departed from Shubra, the banners of the Social Democratic Party and the Maspero Youth (as well as dozens of other political parties and organizations) waved side by side. At that stage, the collective action was directed against the government and the constitution draft process. They did not face repression from the security forces or Islamist groups.

It is naturally too early to tell what the outcome will be of the Church-regime relationship in 2013. In order to shed further light on the matter, section 6.3 deals with the formation of new secular organizations in Egypt after the uprising. Furthermore, section 7.3 will deal with how Copts and the new Coptic organizations frame the changes in opportunity structure, where the regime change and pope change are central.

## **5.4 Indicators**

### ***How did specific changes in the access to state and Church affect the process of collective action development?***

In section 5.1 I demonstrated that there was some variation in access to institutional channels even though this was the “silent period” for Coptic contentious action. The electoral channel was thoroughly manipulated by the Mubarak regime. However, the permission for opposition parties to run in elections seemed to have spurred a new drive in the founding of organizations and press, giving room to a lively but limited public political debate. Meanwhile, the access to secular parties was inhibited by the hijacking of such parties by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Gamaat. Someone who *did* have access to political representatives was the Pope and upper clergy. Yet, legitimate ways for the laity to influence the upper clergy was limited and the Pope was left in charge with selecting the issues that he wanted to discuss with the government. This dynamic continued pretty much unfettered until 2010, when the Mubarak regime refused to intervene in the Muslim protests against the Church. After 2011, in the run up for parliamentary elections, there has been a new drive for the establishment of secular (or “civil”) political parties,

and Copts are entering these parties on a large scale. While the impact and durability of these parties remains to be seen, the current opportunities for Copts to access formal political institutions are bigger than they have been since the beginning of Mubarak's reign. In light of the new Pope Tawadros' seemingly unfavorable attitude towards the Church's participation in politics, as well as the dissolution of the old clientelist networks, the importance of civil (non-clerical) political actors increases.

***How does the alignment of the Egyptian political, economic, and clerical elites encourage or discourage development of Coptic collective action?***

In the first time period I argue that there is a stable alliance between the infitah class, an economic elite who rose to power under previous president Anwar Sadat, and the regime. This elite was uninterested in contentious action, because of its close ties to the regime, and the necessity of keeping those ties if they wanted their businesses to grow. Economic interests therefore trumped solidarity with the rest of the communal group.

Pope Shenouda started his career as an "activist pope", a leader of both the religious and political Coptic community. By the time he was released from exile however, he had changed his mind regarding contentious action. The forming of an alliance with the regime severely inhibited the opportunity to establish independent SMOs and initiate public contentiousness. This is true because Shenouda was granted control over Coptic parliamentary nominations, distribution of church building permits, as well as the political negotiations with the regime on behalf of the Coptic community as a whole. In return he had to ensure calmness among the Copts, and always publicly support the regime. I argue however, that his resignation from public opposition was not an act of complete surrender. He continued to use his alliance with the regime to benefit the Coptic community, but despite Shenouda's attempts to care for his flock, the Coptic community paid a disproportionate price for the few concessions made by the regime. The 2000s saw widespread protests against the authorities, and in 2010 it was clear that the alignment was starting to tremble. With the advent of the secular Coptic elite after 2011, opportunities for collective action have improved. The overthrow of Mubarak has affected the old patron-client networks that separated the economic elite from the middle class. How, and to what extent is naturally too early to say anything about, but judging from what my informants are saying the lay elite is now assuming leadership of the Coptic political community.

***Do the Coptic secular movement have elite allies in either the clergy or politics, and how do these affect the process of changing collective action?***

The first incidents of Coptic collective action that began in the early 2000s shows that the protests that were carried out did not always have direct support in the Church, although the protesters probably were aware that the Church had sympathy for their grievances. As such, the allies of activists cannot be established on a case-to-case basis, but one can assume from the observations discussed under the previous indicator that there was some degree of elite support at least in the clergy. The lack of Copts in the upper echelons of the state bureaucracy, in the NDP and in national politics in general, indicates that the likeliness for elite allies in the political and state sector is rather small.

The Maspero demonstrations that followed the 25 January uprising saw some allies in the clergy, despite Shenouda's discouragement.

***What is the capacity and propensity to repress the Coptic collective actors specifically?***

By exiling Shenouda, and keeping him in exile for a long period of time, the Sadat and Mubarak regime demonstrated their capacity and propensity to repress important figures in the Coptic community. It is clear that the experience of repression made him reconsider his approach to leadership. This is indeed also what my informants say when I ask them about Shenouda. He discouraged public contentiousness not for his personal enrichment or power, but for his love and caretaking of the Coptic community and youth. He knew the regime's capacity to repress, and did not want the Copts to be the victims of this repression.

The 1980s and 90s saw tough repression of Islamic militants and use of the emergency-law to limit public dissent. This repression may have discouraged Coptic collective action as well, although the Islamic militants themselves probably were considered a greater threat. There are few detailed observations of state repression in the instances of Coptic collective action in the 2000s. Neither the intifada-demonstrations, which occurred at the same time, were subject to much repression. As such, the early 2000s had less repression of collective action overall. The Copts are however reported to have clashed with police in the direct aftermath of sectarian tension, and police were often perceived to be taking sides with the Muslim side of sectarian tensions. The increased use of public space for Coptic protests right before, during, and after the 2011 uprising saw harder crack-downs by the security forces, resulting in the Maspero massacre

in October 2011. As a wider secular movement started to take form in Cairo later on, security forces seemed less eager to intervene.

## **6. Mobilizing structures**

This chapter poses the overall question “What formal and informal institutions support the mobilization of Copts, and how do they work?” At first glance the clearly most relevant formal mobilizing structure for the Coptic movement is the Church. Churches and mosques have been a major focus as a social setting utilized for mobilization in the social movement literature (Robinson, 2004; McAdam, 1982; Bayat, 1998). A social setting here refers to a location which provides the “contexts in which social interactions can occur” (Kent, 2006: web). Similar to the previous chapter then, this chapter is about context, albeit at a different level than political opportunities. While discussing the role of the Church is important, there are other social settings as well that can be utilized to shape contentious collective action and secular framing, such as organizations and conferences. I also use this chapter to illustrate that Coptic secularism has been promoted through individuals, using media as a mobilizing structure.<sup>35</sup>

### **6.1 Mobilizing structures 1982-2001**

In 1985, the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights (EOHR) was established by 80 founders, with Coptic elite members among them. This formation took place in the liberal atmosphere of the contested elections at the time. The intention of EOHR was to foster respect among Egyptians for the principles enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While in the beginning the organization had several members from the Coptic elite and upper class, in time the organization became more influenced by activists from the middle class. These new members pushed a more radical agenda, and adhered to what will be described as “rhetoric of persecution” in Chapter 7. The rhetoric of persecution gained foothold in the Coptic middle class in the 1980s. One could therefore have expected that the EOHR would grow, and potentially foster a wider human rights movement in Egypt. Yet, because of the lack of national donors the EOHR grew dependent on funds from foreign donors, such as the Human Rights Watch (Sedra, 1999: 232). This illustrates how formal mobilizing structures are hard to maintain without resources, and

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<sup>35</sup> Individuals are per definition not collectives (as in *collective* action). However, seeing how individuals utilized mobilizing structures to promote secularism contributes to a better explanation for the development of the Coptic secular movement.

furthermore that organizational resources can be limited by opportunity structures. In this case, the elite alignment between the regime and the upper class may have served to limit the access to resources, as the regime did not look favorably upon critical human rights organizations or the rhetoric of persecution. As a consequence of having to resort to foreign funding EOHR has been severely criticized in the state media, working to delegitimize the organization (Hulsman, Turner, Rye Nielsen and Neubert, 2009).

Interestingly, there was a second attempt by the elite to establish a human rights organization that fronted the national unity discourse. The Center of Egyptian Human Rights for the Consolidation of National Unity (CEHRCNU) was established as an organization to be independent of foreign funding. The center suffered the same fate as the EOHR, and was taken over by an activist lawyer who was very active in the persecution discourse, Maurice Sadiq (Sedra, 1999: 232). It therefore became dependent on a single individual, and lost much of its significance as a potential mobilizing structure for Coptic collective action. Maurice Sadiq was famous for filing court cases that could bring media attention to his cause, but there were no other lawyers in his organization that provided legal aid to Copts on a wider scale. Indeed, the single focus on Maurice Sadiq on all occasions when the organization was mentioned led the Arab-West Report to conclude “In this organization there seems to be only one person, as no other names are mentioned in the articles” (Hulsman, Turner, Rye Nielsen and Neubert, 2009: 108).

Both of the organizations above are examples of human rights initiatives that could have strengthened organizational capacity for contentious action in this period. The CEHRCNU was active throughout the 1990s, and published many controversial statements in the media (Hulsman, Turner, Rye Nielsen and Neubert, 2009: 103-109). Today, there is a wide range of Human Rights organizations, and many of them have Coptic grievances on their agenda (Hulsman, Turner, Rye Nielsen and Neubert, 2009). However, they often only challenge authorities on certain policy areas (Carapico, 2012: 205), and are accordingly not regarded as contentious actors.

It is clear that organizational structures are limited by the opportunity structures of the Egyptian autocratic regime, and this should also be the point of departure when analyzing the Church as a mobilizing structure. Apart from Shenouda’s effort to maintain the Church-regime partnership, another aspect of his leadership was the successful effort to expand the Church as an institution as well as the role it played in all Copts’ life. Under his papacy, the number of bishops

grew from 23 in 1971 to 49 in 2001, and the number of monks increased from 200 to 1,200. Moreover, monk- and priesthood became reputable occupations, and the clerical positions were filled predominantly by well educated people. The Church attendance increased massively. Shenouda instituted a weekly papal address broadcasted via television, and the Copts filled their spare time with activities that were organized by the Church. The laity also participated directly in the organizational structure as deacons and church servants. The youth continued to be incorporated through the Sunday School Movement, an organization that was initiated by Shenouda in the 1970s to educate young Copts on religious heritage. Furthermore, the Church continued to expand its social services, administered by the “Coptic Orthodox Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services”, to provide material assistance, educational classes, literacy programs, and job training schemes. All in all, the Church continued to fill the gap that was left open by the secular Coptic elite, who had lost the confidence of the community (Iskander, 2012: 74-75; McCallum, 2007: 931-932). This all-embracing activity served to give the Church legitimacy for its leading role:

“For increasing parts of the Coptic population, the Church is not just a source of spiritual and moral guidance, but also a provider of services and a social safety net, an educator and employer, and a ‘patron’ and protector. To the extent that the Church performs all these functions, or keeps them within its orbit, it creates legitimacy for its own leading role in the Coptic community; this explains the fact that, in spite of the despotic potential of clerical authority that has not escaped many observers, most Copts have tended to accept and obey this authority, in spiritual as well as temporal matters” (Elsässer, 2011: 135).

One should see this much expanded role of the Church in light of especially two related factors, firstly the established identity of Copts as a distinctly religious group. Their non-Muslim faith in a predominantly Muslim country is what allows them to be defined as a communal group in the first place. As the Church is the only institution that includes the entire community, remembering that the Copts in Egypt are geographically scattered, it becomes the natural focal point of common activities (McCallum, 2007). Secondly, one should see the expansion in light of the religious revivalism that developed in Egypt between 1930 and 1970. This time period was characterized by devout Christians and Muslims who educated themselves and held new visions for how religion should be practiced in the modern era. The most important visions for the Copts were to preserve the community and strengthen its identity. The difference between the Christians and Muslims was that the visionary religious Copts went into the Church, and

managed to initiate the reforms they were hoping for. The visionaries of the revivalist period thereby constituted the core of the senior Clergy from the 1980s until today. The Muslims on the other hand, concentrated their revivalism on a the development of a more political Islam, and were not fully absorbed in the religious institution such as the Copts (Elsässer, 2011: 81).

Most importantly, Pope Shenouda acted as the political spokesperson of the community. McCallum (2007: 935) argues that there are three aspects of the needs of a community, the spiritual, the social, and the political, all of which the Church attempted to fulfill. The acceptance on the part of the laity that the Church would represent them politically must be seen in light of the Church's fulfillment of the other two aspects. This acceptance, combined with the incredible outreach of the Church to the community, made the Church a feasible mobilizing structure. Not because the Church was used to organize collective action, but because the Copts could further their grievances to the Clergy, and then let the upper echelons of the Clergy communicate these to the regime (McCallum, 2007).

## **6.2 Mobilizing structures 2001-2011**

I wrote in the previous chapter that the al-Naba demonstrations of 2001 coincided with the demonstrations in support of the second intifada demonstrations on 2000 and 2001. The Intifada demonstrations in 2000 and 2001 were the first incidents of what Shehata terms a “wave of youth activism” which continued through the 2000s (Shehata, 2012: 105). The al-Nabaa demonstrations were also youth-based (Soliman, 2009: 144), making them part of the youth wave that Shahata discusses. While section 6.1 concentrated on the formal organization of the church, 2001-2011 saw the blossoming of informal networks between youth. In turn, these networks developed stronger organizational ties towards the end of the decade. The Coptic Church has however been looming as a strong institution in the background. It also served as both the target of collective action, as well as the mobilizing structure in a series of protests in Luxor in 2001. The congregation there objected to a decision by pope Shenouda to replace their bishop, and demonstrated inside and outside the church during services (Hilmi, 2001). While geographically distant to the more politically oriented collective action that were to emerge in Cairo, these demonstrations against the Patriarch marked the beginning of a decade where the Church's authority were to be contested repeatedly.

Nevertheless, as late as in 2007, Fiona McCallum concluded about the Coptic Church: “At present, there are no credible rivals to the role of the church as a civil representative of the



community” (McCallum, 2007: 925). From 2007 to 2009 three examples from the Egyptian Press provide anecdotal evidence for the argument that the Church-regime alliance was “absorbing” the grievances of Copts. The first stated that Copts generally took almost “all” their problems, social, economic, and political, to the Church, instead of seeking out the appropriate state institution (al-Baz, 2008, cited in Iskander, 2012: 83). The second reported that 50 Christians had protested the lack of government response over the alleged appropriation of their land. They first sent several messages to Pope Shenouda. Only when their complaint was not dealt with via the Church, they sought out the local government office to seek compensation (al-'Asqalany, 2007, cited in Iskander, 2012: 84). In 2009 al-Masry al-Youm reported that Copts went to the Church for help with the swine flu issue, but the Church refused to interfere (Bayoumi, 2009, cited in Iskander, 2012: 84; also see Seef and Jeppson, 2013).<sup>36</sup>

The examples illustrate two points. Firstly, the Church clearly is expected by many Copts to deal with their concerns, even when these concerns are obviously about issues that the state is responsible for. Accordingly, the citizens that ask the Church for help in these instances must expect that the Church has a strong ability to influence the state bureaucracy and/or the government. Secondly, the examples show that the Church, at least in this period, on several occasions is incapable or unwilling to deal with the issues that are brought before it by the laity. Rather, the susceptibility on the part of the regime for Coptic demands was limited. Despite the efforts by Pope Shenouda, the government did not initiate any tangible reforms to deal with Coptic grievances, especially regarding security and discrimination. The concessions made by the regime can rather be characterized as “cosmetic acts to placate the patriarch and the community” (McCallum, 2007: 934).

The partnership with the regime does therefore *not* seem to indicate a trade of services, where the Church quells the Coptic opposition, and in return the Coptic communal group is catered for. Mubarak and Shenouda (and the clerical elite) sought primarily the same thing: to stay in power. While Mubarak wanted to resume his presidency, Shenouda and the upper clergy wanted to continue to act as the leaders of the Coptic community. Mubarak tolerated that the

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<sup>36</sup> The swine flu issue was an incident that occurred during the influenza virus pandemic in 2009, referred to colloquially as “swine flu”. On the orders of the government, about 300,000 pigs were butchered in Egypt, allegedly as a preventative measure. However, the virus could not be transferred by eating pork, or dealing with pigs. Naturally, the Christians are the main consumers and producers of pork in Egypt (Seef and Jeppson, 2013). Notably, pig-farming is an important source of income for many of the poorer Christian families in the Cairo suburbs (Elsässer, 2011: 127).

Church leadership criticized the regime in moderate terms. In turn, the Church leadership desisted from real agitation and mobilization, and gave public support to the regime when circumstances required it (Elsässer, 2011: 110; Iskander, 2012: 84). Such a reading of the Church-regime relationship would be consistent with the Ellen Lust-Okar's conceptualization of political representation in the MENA. She argues that in countries with little transparency and weak rule of law, individuals depend on *wastas* to accomplish goals that somehow involve the state. *Wastas* are mediators between the state and the citizens (Lust-Okar, 2009). This means that the Church cannot be viewed as a mere "absorber", or channel of Coptic collective action, but as an institution that has worked between the state and the Coptic citizens. Indeed, according to Elsässer (2011: 110) "In any instances of Coptic protest since the 1980s, the Church leadership has consistently played the role of a mediator between its flock and the government, rather than the role of an initiator, as in the 1970s".

The formal organizational structure of the Church therefore seems to neither encourage nor discourage Coptic collective action in this period. While the Church can attempt to dampen contentiousness, it can at the same time negotiate with the regime. One interview that I conducted with a priest in Cairo further illustrates the role of the local churches for their congregations, and the central Church for the community. The interview was generally about the situation after 2011, but arguably this statement holds for earlier time periods as well:

"Yes people come to me and talk about certain grievances and what commonly happens then is to contact the local authorities like sort of the head of the governorate so on the local scale and yes we talk to men in politics...and if it's something big like a church is brought down or some people who are attacked in a church like in Nagaa Hamady or Alexandria it's then raised to the pope and the pope would decide what to do and maybe he can contact the minister or someone higher in the hierarchy" (Informant 8, 2012).

Despite the good reputation of the Church in the community, the bonds between the Church and the regime did not avoid public scrutiny by the Copts in the 2000s. In what can be viewed as a reaction to the negotiations by religious elites on behalf of the majority, a few secular initiatives took form in civil society. The Secular Copts Front was established in the early 2000s. They convened three conferences that called for reforms of the Church's clerical institutions and its relationship with the state, and used the press to debate these issues with the Church leadership. Writing was a fundamental part of their activism, and they clearly benefited from the new-found opportunities of a liberalized press. The organization also had a youth section,

although their numbers and activities are not well documented. However, the organization suffered a reduction of members in 2008, due to a disagreement. Those who left the organization felt that it had abandoned its secular ethos, in favor of becoming an ecclesiastical reform movement (Iskander, 2012: 42, 134; Zahra, 2008). Another critic of the Church-state relationship, Dr. George Bebawi, reappeared on the Egyptian media scene in 2006. He was previous Dean of the Coptic Theological Seminary, and advisor to Shenouda and President Sadat. Previously he had criticized Shenouda's meddling in politics in an interview with BBC. In 2006 he published an article in the Egyptian newspaper *Roz al-Yusef*, criticizing the theological stances of the Patriarch (Iskander, 2012: 136). This single individual was not so important for mobilization overall, but along with the Secular Front he helped stirring up some noise about secularism in the mid-2000s. As such, the independent organizational structures willing to criticize the Church and the regime, and the connection between them, were rather sparse in the mid-2000s. They did, however, constitute an effort to promote alternative political views that had been largely unseen in the past 20 years. Accordingly, there was a slight revival and possibly rebirth of a Coptic secular alternative in this period.

From the paragraphs above one can conclude that formal organizations to a limited extent served as mobilizing structures for the many instances of Coptic collective action in this period. Meanwhile, the Church and public space must also be considered as social settings where *informal* mobilizing structures can take shape. The central Church organization was not mobilizing in the protests in the 2000s, but the local churches still filled a role as mobilizing structures. Demonstrations were almost exclusively held on church property (Elsässer, 2011: 241). Judging from the interview with Informant 12 however, it seems that a lot of local priests have a scope of action that allows them to act independently. This is supported by Elsässer, who observed the emergence of a new Coptic Magazine, founded in 2004 by priests Mityas Nasr and Filobater Gamil Aziz in Cairo. The magazine, named al-Katiba at-Tibiya (the Theban Legion) questioned the Church leadership's effectiveness in pursuing Coptic demands by publishing stories of discrimination and persecution. These topics were not commonly addressed in Egyptian press or open discourse, but resembled the discourses in Coptic internet forums (Elsässer, 2011: 241).

The Coptic internet portals that opened during the 2000s became widely popular among Egyptian Copts. They especially benefitted from internet portals as a community because they are

geographically scattered. The online Coptic community is used extensively for networking, maintaining and creating relationships among younger Copts. Forums and online groups often require membership, ideal to create online spaces confined only to the Coptic community. In a survey of the Coptic internet users, Iskander found that 53 percent used internet primarily to make contact with other Copts (2012: 50).<sup>37</sup> The Coptic Church has both a direct and indirect impact on Coptic websites and internet portals. Many Copts use internet for religious purposes, and 14 of the 20 most used Coptic web sites are run by clergy members or churches. The Church has resources and infrastructure to make use of communication technology, including numerous web pages, as well as three affiliated TV-channels. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the advent of internet and social media did not at once spur attempts to politically mobilize Copts online. Most Egyptian Copts stuck to discussing spiritual matters, and expansion of internet usage did not lead to increased diversity in voices of dissent. There seemed to appear one exception towards the end of the decade, however, namely Coptic blogs that expressed increasingly diversified opinions (Iskander 2012: 64, 142-144).

Yet, there is a difference in the online activism of Egyptian Copts and that of the diaspora. Many of the diaspora Copts have been very vocal about Coptic grievances online. They openly criticize the Church and organize collective action on the ground in their home countries through the internet. By being constantly connected to Copts in Egypt they are kept updated on Coptic grievances, and can voice these grievances in their home countries (Iskander, 2012: 145). This did however not lead to collective action in Egypt in the 2000s. This new communication channel may have opened for diffusion of online discourses, but not of collective action itself. In sum, internet communication was ready and able to be used as a mobilizing structure for large parts of the 2000s, as Copts benefitted greatly from networking online. Still, they did not seize the opportunity to use online mobilization for collective action on the ground.

Iskander (2012: 159-160) argues that the Omraneya protests of 2010 were the first incident of Coptic collective action where they were protesting seemingly without fear of the security forces in public space. This affected their later reactions to the Alexandria bombing on New Year's Eve 2010. 1000 Copts were celebrating New-Year's inside al-Qidissayn Church when a bomb exploded outside, killing 23 and injuring many more. There was an instant reaction of outright sectarian violence, as well as clashes between Copts and the police. A more symbolic

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<sup>37</sup> The number of respondents in survey is not stated.

and visible reaction came later, when the funeral for the victims was held in Alexandria. During the service, Patriarch Shenouda expressed gratitude towards the regime and security services. Many of the attendees responded by shouting “no”, and expressing their opposition to Mubarak. The incident repeated itself at the Coptic Christmas liturgy later in January 2011. These events led to a relatively independent Coptic political stream, joining the 25 January uprising against the will of Shenouda (Iskander, 2012).

In the first interview with informant 3, a central figure within the Maspero Youth Union, he talked about the Coptic independent organizations of the late 2000s:

“I was working also with other Coptic activists, and we formed what is known as “Copts for Egypt movement”. This is a movement that is like Maspero Youth Union, but before the revolution, it was in 2009. I think we were the first group in the recent era, started by Copts to demonstrate in the street. We demonstrated in the Church and in the street. We went to Tahrir after Naga Hammadi occurred, I don’t know if you heard about it, seven youth were killed, six were Christians, one was Muslim. ...[by] a policeman, at Christmas, seventh of January. The demonstrations were in February. It was the first time that Christians, Copts, I think Copts, came out to Tahrir square, and we were about 500 people there. The media spoke about it as it was something unique. You know Amr Adeeb spoke about it in al-Qahera al-Youm, a famous program at the time, and said: “this is the first time Copts have come, today they are 500, tomorrow they will be 5000 and the day after tomorrow they will be five million”. It was the first time” (Informant 3, 2012a).

These observations indicate that there was not only an independent Coptic political stream, but also Coptic independent SMOs that could take leading roles in the later nation-wide uprising. They were clearly in opposition to the regime. To say that they were in direct opposition to the Church and/or the Pope would be an overstatement, but they most certainly defied the Patriarch’s warnings against participation in anti-government protests (Iskander, 2012; Asher-Schapiro, 2012). They were also a development from the previous independent organizational structures limited to elite individuals discussed above, and made extensive use of public space, as opposed to Church ground.

### **6.3 Mobilizing structures 2011-2013**

The Church was burned in Atfeeh ...[in] March 2011. There was no Maspero Youth Union at that time. The Coptic activists came to the street with the families, which were sent out of the village. ... When activists came to the street, they used to lead. They increased and increased, and it was the first set-up that occurred in the recent era, in March 2011 for Copts, and it was very obvious that the Copts had come out of the Church to the street. And they now deal with the country on their own” (Informant 3, 2012a)

As indicated in this quote, the street became a more important place for Coptic collective action just before and after 2011. Informant 3 speaks of how independent Coptic activists brought victims of discrimination (“the families”) with them, and organized a demonstration. March 2011 was in the immediate aftermath of the 25 January uprising, which had several consequences. On the one hand, the overall increase in collective action and lack of government control led to an increase in sectarian clashes in this period. On the other hand, the victims had greater opportunity to express their grievances publicly. While there were some independent Coptic SMOs in place before the 2011 uprising, the initial mobilization in 2011 seems to have happened much as a spontaneous reaction to discrimination:

“The Copts that were mobilized initially because... it was very spontaneous and it was initially for the basic reason of I’m fighting for my right...I was attacked while I was praying...further on these movements started to shape...these movements in still lacks vision. They don’t know what to do especially post-revolution because it was very spontaneous”(Informant 9 and Informant 10, 2012).

However spontaneous the initial mobilization of Copts, the locating of collective action outside the Maspero building was not incidental. Tahrir square, the “center of the revolution” approximately 500 meters away from Maspero, became a focal point for Salafist and other Islamic oriented activists in the aftermath of the initial uprising, making Tahrir a hazardous place for Coptic collective action. The Maspero building also contained public broadcasters and media outlets that for a long time had ignored or toned down the sectarian violence in Egypt. By placing themselves at their doorstep, the Copts ensured getting the media’s attention (Sedra, 2012). As such, the Coptic activists found ways to benefit from the street, as they had benefitted from using the church property.

The site of Maspero became the birthplace of the Maspero Youth Union (MYU), formed shortly after the violence in Atfeeh (in the village of Sol), referred to in the quote above. MYU then at once started to participate in “almost all activities which happened in the street with other leftist, with other secular groups” (Informant 3, 2012a). However, the formation did not happen without the assistance of clergymen. Father Mityas and Filobater, also referred to in Chapter 5, were central in the establishment of the MYU. Informant 3 refers to them as “consultants”, but do not hesitate to point out that there is still a connection between the organization and the fathers, as well as several other priests who participate in the movement. Yet, he claimed that the organization had clear distinctions between the religious and the political. “But in the Egyptian

society ... it's *difficult* to cut the relations with the mosque and the Church" (Informant 3, 2012a). In explaining the relationship between the Church and the youth organizations, Informant 13 puts it this way:

*"The Maspero Youth, they are saying to me that they are secular ... They would not like to see the Church in politics?"*

And they know that the current pope is sharing with them this point of view ... We will not finish this role for the Church in one shot. I mean all the year we are in a transitional period. And the final situation will depend on many factors. The nature of the Egyptian regime, if Muslim Brothers will win next parliamentary elections, and they will control over the presidential position, the government, the parliament, then I can expect more tie relations between movements, organizations like Maspero and the Church. But if the non-religious political parties will control over the parliament then we can see some sort of expanding the gap between the Church and the organizations" (Informant 13, 2013).

Accordingly, he understands the relationship between the Church and the Coptic SMOs as a mutual understanding. The MYU objects to a role for the Church in politics, but they know that Pope Tawadros agrees to this point of view. As such, there is nothing radical about MYUs stand. This view, however, disregards the fact that the MYU and the other activists at Maspero defied Shenouda's continuous calls for the activists at Maspero to return to their homes (Iskander, 2012: 167; Bland, 2012: 44). As such, the Pope's directives do not seem to be adhered at all costs, but their views fit better with the pope Tawadros that they did with pope Shenouda.

Informants 9 and 10 are also youth activists, but in other organizations than MYU. They both emphasized that their first engagement in voluntary work was "under the umbrella of the Church". I made the same observation with other informants as well. Considering the dominant role of the Church in social life, discussed in the sections above, this is perhaps no surprise.

What can be understood from this is that the "coming out of the Church" by the Coptic activists facilitated an organizational development once they had engaged in collective action over time. As Informant 13 alluded to, they might still depend on the Church as safety net. However, participating priests, such as Father Mityas and Filobater are also organizational resources that contribute with their experience, as well as bringing legitimacy to the organizations. In interviews with both activists and politicians it was several times alluded to meetings between parties and organizations and the upper Clergy, where matters of authority had been discussed explicitly (Informant 15, 2013; Informant 14, 2013). As such, the shift in political

leadership that appears to be happening after Tawadros assumed the papacy is carefully coordinated, and seems more to be a conscious adjustment than a struggle between clerical and civil authorities. Perhaps a somewhat idealized view, but nonetheless: “I think that it was an unspoken comfort between the people and the church, the church is just letting go, and opening up [for] the involvement of the lay people” (Informant 2, 2012).

While there is coordination between the Church, parties and the SMOs, the new Coptic SMOs are still not that well-coordinated altogether. Several of my activist informants confessed that the various organizations are divided on issues that can be regarded as personal feuds, and often split into factions because of internal disagreements on how to tackle single political issues.

“Sometimes it gets personal, there’s personal difference and views. ... For example the church would say a certain statement. Some groups would be for that statement and others would be against it. Some people would go and protest and demonstrate against these statements and some would gather to support these decisions” (Informant 9, 2012).

The particularistic nature of Coptic organizations corresponds with the discussion of internet usage and social media in section 6.2. While SMOs seem to rely much on social media to communicate (Iskander, 2012: 47), this does not seem to strengthen their unity. MYU use their facebook page very actively, and spread their messages of where and when to meet up ahead of mobilization. They do however struggle to get attendance at less important events. While the MYU has more than 1,100 likes on facebook, they rarely have more than 50 people attending their organizational meetings (Informant 14, 2013). As such, it could seem like social media does not contribute to building organizational infrastructures on the long term.

During my time on fieldwork in Cairo I nonetheless witnessed increasing coordination between Christian organizations. In January 2013, I observed a meeting that gathered high ranking members from the Coptic Orthodox as well as Catholic Church’s political committees, members of the Social Democratic Party, several representatives from Human Rights Organizations, as well as the MYU and the “Copts for Egypt Movement”, an SMO similar to MYU.<sup>38</sup> The purpose of the meeting was to seek increased communication between the organizations, and attempt to coordinate common stands on issues where they all could agree. The head speaker assured however, that it was not an attempt to establish a Coptic party. One

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<sup>38</sup> The Social Democratic Party members stated that they were not there as representatives of their party, but as Christian individuals.



observation from this meeting was that it included rather resourceful organizations and individuals in the Coptic community, meeting with the not-so-resourceful youth organizations. Meetings were also to be held later on, where more youth organizations were to be included (Informant 3, 2013). This bonding between resourceful elites and the grass roots indicates a counter development to the previously observed divide between the regime-connected business class, and the middle and lower classes.

The MYU was positive to this initiative, but according to Informant 3 many of the other Coptic youth organizations disagreed to such coordination because it could limit their freedom to act as they wanted. The fact that the meeting took place, and that MYU was present, indicates that the MYU can be seen as part of a wider Coptic movement. On the other hand, the MYU also participates in collective action alongside other non-Coptic SMOs, such as the now famous 6<sup>th</sup> April youth movement, as well as parties in the opposition. In an interview with two youth politicians in a newly founded party, the informants emphasized the importance of MYU as a coordinator on the ground. Their party, “The Future Party” (*Misr el-Mustaqbal*), was often in dialogue with MYU to coordinate demonstrations and protest, and other forms of activism (Informant 9 and 10, 2012). This role was also emphasized by the members of the Social Democratic Party (Informant 17, 2013; Informant 16, 2013; Informant 15, 2013; Informant 13, 2013), as well as the MYU members themselves (Informant 3, 2012a; 2012b; 2013; Informant 7, 2012; Informant 14, 2012). This skill is both valuable and necessary in the post-2011 opposition landscape, as the regime change spawned a large number of new political organizations and parties. Allegedly, the MYU coordinated with more than 30 other organizations ahead of some of the marches in November (Informant 3, 2012b).

This role was especially utilized in the mobilization against the president, the constitutional assembly, and eventually the constitutional draft in late 2012. They had a prominent role in mobilizing marches, sit-ins, and rallies, especially in the district of Shubra, where there are a lot of Coptic residents. During this period the MYU applied and developed a large a “repertoire of contention”; various ways to engage in collective action (Tarrow, 2011: 29). Informant 3 and 14 emphasized that aside from mobilizing for demonstrations, the MYU frequently wrote contributions to newspapers, organized petitions, and attended sit-ins and rallies. To mobilize for large demonstrations, Informant 3 explained that they used a “cultural marches”, where a few activists march through neighborhoods and call people out to participate. They use

rhymes and chants and gather a larger crowd as they go along. During my fieldwork the MYU also participated in several press conferences, where they talked on behalf of the Copts.

## **6.4 Indicators**

### ***Does the development of Coptic collective action benefit from the Church's resources and interpersonal network?***

When Pope Shenouda returned from exile in 1985, he initiated a process that expanded the reach of the Church into the political and social, as well as the spiritual sphere. The status of the Clergy was raised due to higher salaries and education. The Church thereby drew a lot of resources under its roof, at the expense of Coptic civil society. The connection to the regime also made the Church a channel for voicing of grievances against the regime. As such, one can say that the Church worked as a mobilizing structure of some sort, but not for contentious collective action. Rather, it worked as a mediator (or “wasta”) by solving problems and grievances locally, and passing concerns up the system when it was necessary. This does not implicate that the Church made the regime cater for the Copt's needs at all times. On the contrary, the Church kept the community calm, but got few concessions in return.

The Church continued its expansive role into the 2000s, but also started serving as a mobilizing structure more in line with social movement theory. Church grounds were used for mobilization and as safe havens for Coptic collective action, as they protested against the regime, and sometimes against the Church patriarchy itself. While Coptic collective action generally benefitted from this, there was still no strong collective of secular activists who engaged in collective action. In the aftermath of the 25 January uprising however, some ‘liberal’ priests started to help organizing SMOs that were more secular in nature. The contentious action had now moved away from Church grounds, but my research indicates that there are still strong bonds between secular activists and their churches, and that they are assisted by activist priests.

### ***How does informal youth networks and information technology affect the development of Coptic collective action?***

The silent 80s and 90s seem to have isolated both young and old Copts in the church. Indeed, a majority of my informants came from backgrounds in ecclesiastical voluntary work and activities. The al-Nabaa demonstrations were conducted primarily by youth, and youth continued to dominate in the collective action that followed in the 2000s. “The new generation” is elevated as distinguished from their parents, in that they have had the courage to lift the Coptic grievances

out of the Church and onto the street (Informant 13, 2013). The SMOs that are described below took shape in an environment of spontaneous collective action, initiated primarily by youth. They use social media as tools for mobilization. It is unclear how social media has affected the process of movement development directly. Social media seems not to strengthen organizational coherence.

***Did establishment of SMOs affect the development of Coptic collective action?***

The 1980s saw the establishment of several human rights organizations that included many Coptic members. They could potentially have developed into organizers of collective action, but failed to do so, because of their inability to embrace across both the Coptic elites and lower classes. A spark of secular organizational activity occurred in the mid 2000s, when parts of the Coptic intelligentsia formed the “Secular Coptic Front”. However, their activities was limited to a few conferences, and failed to mobilize a secular alternative to the clerical leadership of the Coptic communal group. Social movement organizations started appearing in the late 2000s, with the establishment of the “Copts for Egypt Movement”, which fronted the interests of Copts independent of the Church. A real increase in the degree of organization of Coptic collective action happened in after the 25 January uprising in 2011. After an increase in attacks on Christians, and specifically the burning of a church in Atfeeh, the Maspero Youth Union was established. The organization participates in collective action alongside other Egyptian opposition organizations and parties, and demands a secular state where all citizens have equal rights. It has gained a reputation on the ground for being a good organizer, although it does not have many regularly attending members.

## **7. Framing Processes**

This chapter discusses the framing processes that shape the perceptions of political opportunity and grievances. The framing process serves as a filter between the changes in opportunity structure, grievances and the movement or SMO. My approach to framing processes address how these perceptions are shaped into narratives or ideologies at several levels. On the ground are the symbols, slogans, and ideologies that are used by activists and SMOs in collective action. These are for example banners with the image of the crescent and the cross or a statement of movement goals. The crescent and the cross would signal a concern for the almost any grievance, and at the same time the adherence to a nationalist ideology to overcome such grievances. A list of

movement goals signals a movement's perceptions of grievances, selected on the basis of the grievances it considers important. Additionally, the movement is likely to have selected the goals on the basis of what is achievable under the current opportunity structure.

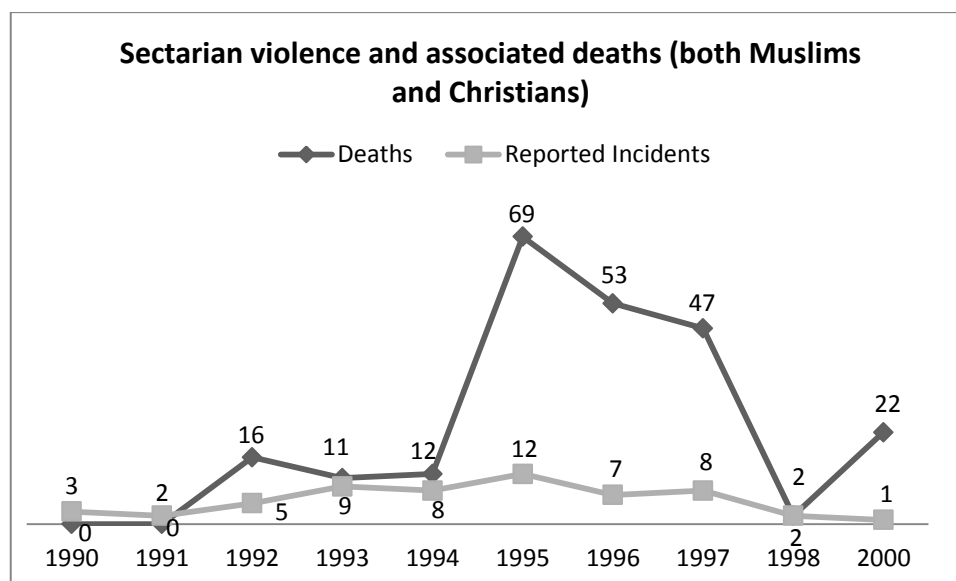
These perceptions are not formed in a vacuum. I have already established the importance and authority of the Church earlier in the thesis. How the Church frames opportunities and grievances is therefore likely to inflict on how its adherents form their perceptions. The regime will also have its preferred way of framing minority problems. Similarly, various media sources contribute to the formation of perceptions both as actors with their own views, but also in the way they mediate the news and information (Zald, 1996: 270). This sum of actors contributes to a public discourse. In order to deal with this multitude of perspectives, I use the following analytical strategy: In the first time period, there is no Coptic collective action. What can be analyzed therefore is the public discourse related to Coptic grievances. I thereby briefly address Coptic grievances in the period, before I account for the discourse inside and outside of the Church. In the second period there are many instances of Coptic collective action. I thereby use examples from these instances, and discuss their framing processes, in addition to addressing the general discourse. In the third section of the chapter I will discuss the framing processes of the new formed Maspero Youth Union, as a representative example of the new Coptic secular SMOs.

## **7.1 Framing 1981-2001**

### **7.1.1 Grievances**

In figure 5 below, the graphs show reported incidents of Coptic grievances per year, and reported deaths of both Copts and Muslims associated with the reported incidents. The grievances reported are confined to discrimination and attacks based on the victims' Coptic identity. Examples include gun attacks, vandalizing of Coptic property, as well as anti-Coptic riots. While the darker graph displays fatalities of both Copts and Muslims, Copts took the biggest share of these. The high number of incidents in the mid-nineties is associated with the political violence by militant Islamist groups, which peaked in the mid-1990s (See Bayat, 1998; Owen, 1999; and Tadros, 2012). In year 2000, the death toll rose once again, due to a single dispute in the village of Al-Kosheh, claiming the lives of more than 20 Copts.

**Figure 5) Reported grievances 1990-2000**



*Source: Minorities at Risk project (2010), Iskander (2012: 97) and El-Magd (2000)<sup>39</sup>*

Despite the high level grievances compared to the later time periods, no contentious action occurred throughout the decade.<sup>40</sup> As such, a high level of grievances cannot alone account for Coptic collective action. Below, I argue that the way grievances and opportunity structures were framed by the Church and public actors at the time reduced the likelihood of Coptic collective action in this period.

### **7.1.2 Framing processes in the Church**

Informant 2, a Coptic bishop, describes the period of the last three to four decades as a time of withdrawal for the Coptic community, and the shifting of political participation as a responsibility of the individual to a responsibility of the Church and government.

“The Coptic community has been through 3-4 decades put to silence. And this way that it was, either by pressure, or by the behavior of the government of Mubarak, because then it was a lot of things that happened at that time, and then the reaction of the Copt was simply, they try to suppress themselves, but still the reaction was very negative against them. And that means that it pushes the Copt for more withdrawal. ... They found that there is no chance, no opportunities for them to be integrated and for them to be outgoing into the society. In this last four or five decades the Christians went into a process of withdrawal” (Informant 2, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> 1981-1990 is left out due to lack of data

<sup>40</sup> See table 4 below for comparison,

Several times in the interview, the Informant alluded to sectarian violence and attacks as “things that happened at the time”, to the “negative reactions”, and “problems that happened ... because of the Muslim–Christian relationship”. By the statement above, he also indicates that the isolation of the Coptic community was a natural reaction to these grievances. Furthermore, he asserts that the access to political institutions was another cause of the Coptic isolation: “and then the involvement of the Copts in the political realm was limited even though they have a voting power that it is not little, but it still they didn’t feel the results” (Informant 2, 2012). The Church taking charge of political affairs thereby becomes a natural consequence: “It was enough for them [the Copts] that the Church would take the responsibility of this involvement, or ... the responsibility of talking to the authorities on their behalf” (Informant 2, 2012).

As such, in the perspective of Informant 2, it seems that the lack of Coptic collective action in the 1980s and 1990s can be explained by a withdrawal from society, which happened because of Mubarak’s closed regime, and the Islamic insurgency. The process of withdrawal should also be seen in light of the Egyptian religious revivalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Coptic Orthodox Church offered social services and created networks centered on religious institutions, designed to promote a religious way of life, upholding “family values” and traditional gender relations. Both Copts and Muslims “drew boundaries around their communities” (Elsässer, 2011: 143), reinforcing the Coptic withdrawal. Elsässer suggests two possible causes for this development: the will of the Church leadership, and the hostile environment. Accordingly Informant 2, being part of the Church leadership, may be placing a too much emphasis on the environment. The view that the Church only acted in reaction to the political opportunity structure is however supported by many Copts. One of today’s Coptic activists formulated the period of withdrawal in this way:

“The Country, say, dissolved all the Copts in the Pope. And say, when we deal with the Copt, we deal with the Pope ... When they want to make pressure on the Copts, and stop their voice, they press on the Copts, and the pope. So, it was I think a country policy, not a Coptic policy. When there was the parties, ... [they were not] *true parties*. They have no ideology, have no role in the political view ... There was only the National Democratic Party of Mubarak. ... When there are no parties ... there is no place to participate policy in it. And coming to street was not available. As of the time. So Copts come, we say: *Inside the wall of the Church*” (Informant 3, 2012a).

It is clear the Informant 3 sees the regime as responsible for the Church-regime relationship, while Shenouda acted out of necessity. Furthermore, he emphasize the point that was made in

Chapter 5, that party politics has been an unavailable channel for political participation. He also saw “coming to the street” as unavailable. Regardless of what caused the Coptic withdrawal, it is sure to have inflicted on the Copts’ perception of the environment. In the perspective of Coptic revivalism, the outside world is dominated by Islam. The reaction of the Coptic community was to more than before choose Christian names for their children, making monasteries symbolic and actual centers of community life, and mistrusting non-Copts (Elsässer, 2011: 143-153). Accordingly, among themselves the clergy and the laity framed the outside environment as threatening, and the Church walls as their strongest protection.

The combination of a de-facto threat from Islamist militants and the framing of Muslims in general as a threat, made the use of public space for a collective action an unlikely alternative for Copts in this period. The number of attacks on Christians in this period was higher than in any other. This indicates that the extent of grievances cannot alone account for Coptic collective action. The Church framed itself as the crib and harbinger of Egyptian Christian culture, encouraging Copts to gather inside the Church, instead of facing the Islamist threat with a clear voice.

Outwards, Pope Shenouda framed the Coptic community as united with the rest of the population: “We are not a minority in Egypt. We do not like to consider ourselves a minority, and do not like others to call us a minority” (Human Rights Watch cited in Sedra, 1999: 219). This view can be regarded as the “national unity perspective”, which was the nearly hegemonic perspective on the relationship between Egypt’s religious groups at the time. This is contrasted by the “persecution perspective”, which frames the Copts as a persecuted minority (Sedra, 1999).

Paul Sedra argues that Pope Shenouda originally was an eager defender of Coptic rights in the public sphere. He was one of the educated and progressive monks that had entered the Church during the religious revival, and was keen to see a stronger role for the Church in the social and political realm. When he was bishop of education in the 1960s, he led highly popular meetings with the Sunday School Movement, where he taught youth how to deal with modern day challenges. In the 1970s, after he became pope, he publicly defended Copts against threats to their equality. This public promotion of Coptic rights came to its peak in his open criticism of President Sadat, which led Sadat to exile Shenouda to a monastery in the desert (Sedra, 2009: 1057-1059).

The rhetoric of Pope Shenouda changed drastically while in exile. As early as in 1982 his rhetoric developed a conciliatory tone, when he started to discourage the protests he once organized. In August and September 1983 Pope Shenouda gave some lectures on individual behavior which were later published in a compendium. In these lectures the Patriarch referred to the scriptures and encouraged peace and calmness among the Copts. “The calm person, one who loves peace, is not only calm himself, but tries to make others around him calm to spread peace around them” (Shenouda III, 1989: 18). The message could not have been much clearer: the Copts were not to rebel. Combined with the self-imaging of withdrawal and isolation, the national unity discourse that dominated the national media kept the lid firmly on top of the potential contentiousness in the Coptic community.

### **7.1.3 The discourse of national unity**

The national unity perspective denied the existence of a Coptic minority, and perceived the Copts as harmoniously integrated in Egyptian society, indistinguishable from Egyptian Muslims. Adherents of this perspective used powerful imagery to illustrate the strong bond between Christians and Muslims, writing of army commanders “quoting the Qur’an and the Bible in one breath”, and images of “the Coptic clergyman nursing the sick child of the Egyptian leader back to health” (Sedra, 1999: 221). Egyptian identity was bound to the soil and not to religion. This intellectual stream explored notions of citizenship and how to strengthen a citizen-based identity in Egypt (Sedra, 1999: 231).

The second strand of thought, the rhetoric of persecution, distinguished Copts from Muslims in drastic terms, highlighting what they saw as historical, cultural, and racial differences. According to this view, Copts are direct descendants of the ancient Egyptians, and struggle to keep foothold “under the Moslem Yoke” (Karas, 1985, cited in Sedra, 1999: 222). Importantly however, this strand of rhetoric had its origin in the diaspora, especially in the American Coptic Association (ACA) in the 1970s (Elsässer, 2011: 104). The diaspora organizations engage in a more radical discourse. Public statements and writings that speak of “Coptic persecution” therefore often has its origin in the diaspora, and lobbying and activist organizations that are established abroad (Delhaye, 2012: 77 and 90). The confrontational style of framing in the diaspora is evident in ACAs’ publication “The Copts”, where accusations of conspiracies, forced conversion, and attacks against the Copts appear in issues in the 1980s and 90s. This magazine was crucial in the formation of the persecution discourse. After the



establishment of human rights organizations however, Egypt also saw a national surge of the rhetoric of persecution (Sedra, 1999: 230-231).

While framing takes place as a complex process that mediates between various perceptions of context, groups often find ways to express their message towards external and internal audiences in simple slogans and symbols (Snow et al., 1986). In the case of the Egyptian “national unity narrative” a widely cited slogan is “religion is for God and the nation is for all” (*al-deen lillah wa al-watan lil gamea*). This is often represented symbolically in the image of the cross and the crescent together (Iskander, 2012: 98).<sup>41</sup>

The elitist connection to the national unity perspective became visible with the establishment of The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights in 1985. Several prominent upper class Copts were among the founders. While the initial intent of the organization’s founders was to place the language of Human Rights within the national unity discourse, a growing number of members from the middle class promoted a persecution perspective. In 1992 they issued a report that charged Islamists of “extermination efforts”. Such language was not used by the intelligentsia or Egyptian press (Sedra, 1999: 231). Along with the organization’s foreign funding, the persecution rhetoric probably contributed to the organization getting constantly slammed by the media (Hulsman et al., 2009).

The two opposite perspectives on the relationship between religions in Egypt can be theoretically described as “competing processes” (Zald, 1996: 269). In this case, the persecution perspective was the most radical framing, used by diaspora Copts to draw attention to Coptic grievances, and slowly taking foothold in Egypt in the 1990s. This is the framing of the potential challengers. It competes with the national unity perspective, which clearly favors non-action.

The ideological polarization between the adherents of the persecution perspective and the national unity perspective came to its peak in April 1994 when a private Egyptian research center tried to situate United Nations conference about minority rights in Cairo. A former editor of the state-owned newspaper Al-Ahram criticized the conference for putting the Coptic question on its agenda. The editor declared that the Copts were part of the “unbreakable fabric” of Egyptian national unity, and argued that the conference was to be regarded as an intervention in the

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<sup>41</sup> Iskander (2012: 97) asserts that the national movement of 1919 is the foundation for the framing of national unity in Egypt . In the media articles that discuss sectarian clashes, it is common to refer to the 1919 revolution as a “proof” of the strength of national unity, and as period for the shaping of a national consciousness. Banners with the Cross and the Crescent were frequent in the 1919 revolution.

internal affairs of Egypt (Sedra, 1999: 232; Elsässer, 2011: 160). The editor's article was followed by hundreds of similar announcements from Coptic intellectuals, demanding the cancelation of the conference. As a result, the conference location was changed to Cyprus. Soon after the conference-incident, sectarian clashes broke out in Upper Egypt. According Paul Sedra, the Coptic middle class found themselves in stark opposition to the elitist nationalist discourse towards the end of the nineties (Sedra, 1999: 233). This controversy marks the beginning of a shift in Egyptian intellectual discourse, where the taboo of sectarian issues was gradually lifted. Later in 1994 the first issue about inner Coptic conflict appeared in the national press (Elsässer, 2010: 147).

The discussion of framing processes in the 1980s and 1990s shows that there was a high awareness of Coptic grievances in the Coptic community, and that this even may have been exacerbated by the religious revival. Framing Islam as a threat could however not be done publicly. Instead, the outside threat led to a higher unity between the laity and the Clergy, causing a Coptic withdrawal from society until 2001. In very concrete terms, the Copts framed their opportunity structure as limited to what the Church could achieve.

## **7.2 Framing 2001-2011**

### **7.2.1 Framing processes outside the Church**

In table 3 below I report a sample of grievances between 2001 and 2010. Based on the sources of the table, the number of fatalities was minimal compared to the previous decade. It is also striking that the first incidence of Coptic collective action in nearly three decades occurs in the aftermath of the reported incident in 2001, an article in a weekly newspaper. Considering that one year earlier there was an incident that cost the life of more than 20 Copts (in Al-Kosheh in 1999-2000), a newspaper article seems little to worry about. One cannot exclude that the demonstrations that occurred because of al-Nabaa was due to cumulated grievances over time. However, the demonstrations were framed as a defense of the Church's honor; the collective actors did not address sectarian violence (U.S. Department of State, 2001; El-Magd, 2001; Soliman, 2009: 143-144). This framing is visible in the slogans of the demonstration, which included "With our blood and soul we sacrifice ourselves for the cross!" and "We are not afraid, we are the sons of saints!" (El-Magd, 2001: web).

**Table 3) Reported grievances 2001-2010**

Year	Nmbr of Incidents	Deaths	Example of incident in given year	Subsequent Collective action
2001	2	0	Al-Nabaa incident: Sexual images of alleged monk in Al-Nabaa weekly	Protests
2002	1	0	Church destroyed by police in Cairo, subsequent sectarian violence	None
2003	3	0	Destruction of Coptic homes and fields in a Giza village	None
2004	1	0	Conflict over alleged converted woman (Christian to Muslim)	Protests
2005	1	-	Muslims demonstrated a theater play about conversion outside a Church. A Nun was stabbed during the demonstrations.	Unknown
2006	2	1	Muslim attacked three Churches with a knife in Alexandria, subsequent sectarian violence	Protests
2007	1	-	Attacks against 'illegitimate' Churches	Unknown
2008	2	1	Tribes attacked a Monastery in al-Minya. Several monks were abducted and tortured	Protests in al-Minya
2010	2	11	Drive by shooting at a crowd of Copts outside Church in Naga Hamadi, burning and destruction of Coptic property	Protests at Tahrir by 'Copts for Egypt'

*Sources: Soliman (2009: 144-146); BBC News (2002); Boms (2005); Iskander (2012: 2, 19); BBC News (2010)*

In the incidents of Coptic collective action that began in 2001 and continued throughout the 2000s, the activists had a strong use of religious language and symbolism, which they applied to frame grievances. Elsässer (2011: 241) quotes four slogans from various protests:

“Oh leader Ḥusnī Mubārak, see the rights of the Christians!  
 Oh Shenūda, stand up and take care, we youth are ready to sacrifice our blood for you!  
 With our soul and our blood we sacrifice ourselves for you, oh Church!  
 The Gospel and the Cross are the first and the last!”

The use of religious language indicates that the collective action was on behalf or in defense of the community as a whole. The demonstrations can therefore be considered confessional in nature, as opposed to secular. Notably, in the first slogan the activists ask Mubarak for their rights as Christians. This stands in contrast to a possible framing where they ask for their rights as Egyptians, citizens, or for human rights. The second slogan shows how Shenouda has support, and is addressed as an idol. They express unity with the pope, rather than addressing the Patriarch only with grievances.

In the examples of collective action that were referred to in Chapter 5, there were also examples of confessional framing. In the 2004 demonstrations at the Abassia Cathedral, the

Copts were asking for the release of ‘kidnapped’ Wafaa Qustantin (Soliman, 2009: 144). Such accusations of kidnapping are commonplace. They usually occur as results of disappeared women who are trying to escape their marriage. Christian marriages are regulated by the Church, and divorce is not allowed. There is a loophole, however, in that the person who wants to exit the marriage can convert to Islam, and thus get the marriage annulled (Mahmood, 2012). A nearly similar case got the same amount of attention in 2010, when Camilia Shehata also allegedly was kidnapped (Iskander, 2012). The grievance is thereby framed as a crime that is committed against the Coptic community, in the Qustantin case by “Muslim fanatics”. The “real” grievance however, is that of marriage and conversion laws. The marriage laws can be changed by the Church, and thus would make the Church target of the collective action. The problem that arises after a Christian has converted to Islam is that the state does not allow conversion in the other direction, and thus the divorced person must remain Muslim (Mahmood, 2012). Accordingly, the source of the kidnapping-problems is Church and state laws.

The opportunity to challenge Church and state laws are limited by the autocratic nature of both these institutions, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. As such, the markedly confessional framing of this instance of collective action is conditioned by the perceptions of both the grievance that is being fronted, and the perceptions of opportunity structure. The Muslim side of the conflict will frame the issue as a Christian kidnapping once the woman is taken back, thus spurring more anger and sectarian tension. In the middle of the “war” stand the women, who are objectified as weak beings, who need protection (Soliman, 2009: 145).

In the funeral demonstrations in Alexandria in 2006, the procession was used as a symbol of Coptic grievances. The participants raised a cross, and carried the victim’s coffin, while chanting “with our soul, with our blood, we will defend the Cross” (Soliman, 2009: 146). They also chanted slogans against the governor, who had declared that the Muslim guilty of the murder was psychologically unstable. The demonstration accused the state of being too soft on the attackers in cases of Church attacks. They also demonstrated the use of *orfi*, traditional council meetings to mediate between the communities, and the imbalanced presentation of such attacks by the government and state media, who often refer to them as sectarian clashes (Soliman, 2009: 147). The Cross connotes a confessional framing, and the collective action is clearly committed on the behalf of the community. The demonstration is however directed more against the state than against the Muslim threat. In both of these instances of collective action, grievances are framed as

confessional. Accordingly, they illustrate collective action in itself, but no tendencies towards a secular framing. Both of the cases also illustrate the pretentiousness of the national unity perspective, and a framing that lies closer to the persecution perspective.

To summarize, the collective action in the 2000s marked that Copts had come out of the Church, but remained closely attached to it. The grievances were framed confessionally, as the collective sorrows of a united communal group. This does not explain why it happened at this exact time. The grievances had been there all along, but still not addressed outside the Church. According to some activists, the collective action came about because of the realization that the Church was bound to its role in politics by the autocratic regime:

“Pope Shenouda[‘s] ... original views when he first became pope was to stay away from politics too, until it was inevitable that to come in touch with politics beginning with what happened with Sadat when he exiled him. ... He confined him to stay in his monastery and so he found that it’s inevitable to have some sort of two-way communication with the state. ... [and] to get involved with political life. There were certain warnings given from the system to the church asking for them to be involved” (Informant 6, 2012).

Thereby, there may have been an understanding for the Church’s traditional role in politics. Shenouda was not to be blamed. At the same time the activists saw it as necessary to act independently of the Church to get things done:

“Before the revolution ... the political movement of the Copts didn’t materialize until 2010 and after the Nagaa Hamady incident when then protests took place inside the church and that was urging the church to take actions to make a move towards the state to do anything but that didn’t happen. A very few number of Coptic political activists realized that the church can’t do anything because it involuntarily siding with the state so they can’t do anything massive or extreme against the state so they took to the street on their own and they held a sit-in, in front of the high law court “dar el kadaa el aaly” (Informant 7, 2012).

These two quotations demonstrate that the activists to some extent were aware of the opportunity structure. They saw the Church-regime alignment as something that bound the Church’s actions and that under the current conditions their grievances would not be addressed. They therefore chose to take action on their own. As Informant 7 points out, this realization might not have come before the late 2000s. This would coincide with the cracks in the state-church alliance that became visible during the Camilia Shehata case, referred to in Chapter 5. It also coincides with the change from organizing collective action on Church ground to organizing it on the street, referred to in Chapter 6.

## 7.2.2 Framing processes in the Church

Chapter 5 described some important changes in the opportunity structure in the 2000s. There was a slight liberalization of elections, and a connected process of liberalization of the press. The way the Church framed these issues is important, because it conditioned the continuous relationship with the regime. The Church continued to have patience with Mubarak, because of the growing fear of the alternatives. The Muslim brotherhood got 20 percent of the parliamentary seats in the 2005 elections, and the Church consistently continued to express preference for the autocratic regime. In the 2000, 2005 and 2010 elections, they expressed support for the NDP and Mubarak. Accordingly, they saw a stable autocratic regime as more preferable than a democratic experiment that could push the Muslim Brotherhood into a position of power (Elsässer, 2011: 110-111). The Church magazine *Katiba*, briefly addressed in the previous chapter, framed discrimination and other Coptic grievances in the perspective of persecution, as well as liberalism. Of its aims were

“rejecting any claims of an Arabic identity [of Egypt] and opposing the means through which they are taking root”, and “bringing to light the news that is covered up [by the mainstream media], especially concerning incidents of aggression, destruction, and deceit against Christians, supporting the unfortunate victims and spreading a spirit of Christian martyrdom and the methods of non-violent struggle” (Elsässer, 2011: 242).

Had it not been for the media liberalization after the 2005 elections, such a framing would probably not have been tolerated by the regime (Elsässer, 2011). By the return of a more radicalized persecution perspective discourse, albeit this time expressed from liberal priests, the national unity perspective fronted by Pope Shenouda was being challenged. Another challenge was fronted by a Coptic bishop in 2008. While visiting the United States, bishop Tumas held a public speech at the Hudson Institute in Washington:

“That means the cultural issue of the old Egypt is still carried on. Meanwhile our fellow citizens, they dropped it for another culture. That means a process of Arabization has been ongoing in this country for many centuries, since the seventh century. We would say that this is part of a dilemma. At the same time Islamization as well is a dilemma that started and is still carrying a lot of the problems. So when we hear the word “Copt,” that doesn’t mean only Christian, it is Egyptian” (Hudson Institute, 2008: 3).

One recognizes the claim that Copts are the true Egyptians that “carry on” the old cultural heritage. The Arab invasion is posed as something foreign that has gradually transformed Egypt through Islamization and Arabization, posed as a grievance for the Coptic communal group.

Furthermore his speech emphasized the role of the Church as a crib and harbinger of ancient Coptic culture. It was nursed inside the Church, only to be released at a time when “openness and good thinking would occur” (Hudson Institute, 2008: 3). Tumas did not mention persecution in his speech. Notably, a Coptic diaspora activist in the audience stood up after the speech and announced that by all standards “the Copts in Egypt are persecuted”.<sup>42</sup> Bishop Tumas did not respond to this statement, except for thanking for the comment (Hudson Institute, 2009: web). This seemed to be an indication that Bishop Tumas did not want to be associated with the most radical rhetoric of persecution that is advanced by the diaspora activists.

Even though Bishop Tumas did not use the word persecution, he was certainly associated with what can be classified as a counter-discourse (Elsässer, 2011: 200). The speech was met with harsh reactions in the Egyptian media, and was even condemned by intellectuals that are considered relatively liberal (Saqqa, 2008). Elsässer exemplifies the counter-discourse by referring to three other members of the Church, all of whom have strikingly similar reflections to those of Bishop Tumas. These Church members are from different places within the Church hierarchy, and one can therefore assume that these opinions are more wide-spread than being confined to just a few individuals (Elsässer, 2011: 208). Among the other examples were father Mityas Nasr Minqarius who edited the al-Katiba magazine, as well as helped to initiate the Maspero Youth Union in 2011 (Informant 3, 2012b). The proponents of the counter-discourse are deemed by Elsässer to not be any less selective in their reading of history than the advocates of the national unity rhetoric. Rather, they seem to represent an inversion of it (Elsässer, 2011: 208).

What can be drawn from this is that after the mid-2000s many clergy-members had a more radical language than in the previous time period. The fact that members of the clergy started to comment on Coptic grievances in a language that can be regarded as out of line with the official view of the pope, indicates that the authority of the central Church started to faint. The discourse had radicalized.

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<sup>42</sup> This audience member was Magdi Khalil, well known for media appearances, who represents a view that is closer to that of many Coptic diaspora organizations (see Fawzi, 2008; Khalil, 2010)

### 7.2.3 The national unity discourse

The liberalization of the Egyptian press led issues of the religious tension to the front pages in the 2000s, in contrast to the silent 80s and 90s. A side effect of this liberalization was the gradual transformation of Coptic issues, “from a virtual public taboo, into one of the favorite subjects of the daily and weekly press” (Elsässer, 2010: 131). As such, there was not only a change in the number of Copt-related issues mentioned in the media, but also a change in the framing of these issues. Elsässer used an incident of sectarian tension in Upper Egypt to illustrate the different framings in the different types of media that appeared in the 2000s (2010: 138-140).<sup>43</sup> The newspapers framed the dispute as a conflict between equal parties in a perspective of national unity, and failed to point out the deficiencies in the authorities’ investigation of the event.

This was in great contrast to Coptic internet portals, which put the incident in a context of religious persecution. While the Coptic weekly ‘Watani’ took great care to situate Coptic issues within the Egyptian national context, internet portals connect the issues to international norms, such as human rights and minority rights. The U.S. Copts Association regarded the incident as no less than a terrorist attack in a statement in June, and was followed by a joint declaration of 19 Coptic diaspora organizations who suggested that the events were part of a planned genocide of the Copts. The joint declaration also called for a stronger effort to internationalize the Coptic issue. Elsässer suggested that this approach of “taboo breaking” by calling for international intervention had growing support within the Coptic community in Egypt, even if public intellectuals openly resisted it. The Egyptian media responded to the diaspora activists by resorting to nationalist agitation (Elsässer, 2010: 143-144).

As was pointed out in Chapter 6, the Copts benefitted from the wider access to internet in the 2000s, because it bound them closer together as community. Still, the internet was not widely used for dissent. The topic that most often produce divergent opinions from the Church online is that of persecution, illustrated in the example above. Coptic internet users in Egypt prefer using web sites that frame Coptic grievances in a human rights perspective. Secularism was however only weakly promoted in the Coptic online discourse. Iskander provides a telling example; one of the few secular Coptic facebook groups had only 175 members in 2008. The group’s purpose was to gather Copts with opinions that diverged from those of the clergy and mainstream. Facebook

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<sup>43</sup> The incident was the land dispute between monks and tribesmen in Abu Fana, and the subsequent attack on Abu Fana monastery during the spring and summer 2008. The incident was followed by a lengthy police investigation, local and central negotiations including Pope Shenouda and a National Democratic Party MP (Elsässer, 2010).



groups that discussed spiritual material were far more frequent, and had much higher member shares. Also online articles by Copts that promoted a secular view came under heavy fire from main stream Coptic commenters, especially if they criticized the pope. While secularism apparently did not have great success online, the discourses that developed online challenged the Church (Iskander, 2012: 53-55, 139-142).

In sum, there was a gradual breakdown of the taboo of sectarianism which was extended from the ranks of Coptic intellectuals to parts of the Coptic clergy as well as the Egyptian media in the 2000s. The Egyptian media did still have a biased coverage of sectarian clashes, but they were at least widely covered. This corresponded with the increased rate of Coptic collective action at the time, as well as the cracks in the Church-regime alignment that was beginning to show in the late 2000s, referred to in Chapter 5.

### **7.3 Framing 2011-2013**

#### **7.3.1 Framing of opportunity**

It was apparent that the Church was still siding with the regime after 25 January, also to those Copts who went to the streets on 25 January and the following days of the uprising. However, they did still not criticize Shenouda for his stand. Rather they saw it as an attempt to protect them from violence (Iskander, 2012: 163). The same perceptions were reflected in several of my own interviews with youths and activists. Regarding the particular incident of Shenouda's call for abstention, some outright disagreed with that position, and thought most other Coptic youth disagreed as well (Informant 1, 2012). Yet others emphasized that Pope Shenouda did what he could to assist the community and the Church more generally: the regime was to blame, not the Church (Informant 7, 2012; Informant 6, 2012; Informant 3, 2012a). Still, the final call by Shenouda on 15 May to break up Coptic protests was publicly rejected from Coptic activists (Iskander, 2012: 169). They now acted independently of the Church. No matter how various activists looked at the Patriarch, it was obvious that the uprising and its aftermath was framed as a political opportunity by Coptic youth activists, but not by Shenouda. This breach between the Church and the activists was important for the secular turn of Coptic framing processes:

“Copts promote secularism because we cannot fight discrimination with discrimination. The Maspero massacre was a wake-up call for many Copts. We cannot affiliate ourselves with the church in political matters when these are the results. During the funeral of the victims from the massacre, there were shouts in church – yaskut, yaskut, el Moushir, (throw out, throw out the

Moushir - military leader of SCAF). The shouts suppressed the voice of pope Shenouda. This was something very new. During the Wednesday Masses, there is always absolute silence when Shenouda talks” (Informant 5, 2012).

Egyptian nationalism had a revival with the 25 January uprising (Carapico, 2012: 216; Albrecht, 2012: 264-266; Korany, 2012: 283). This had its impact on the Coptic activists as well: “After the revolution the situation changed a bit. Copts need to come out and say: ‘No, we are not a minority. We are Egyptian citizens. We want a share in our country. We have rights ... ’” (Informant 3, 2012a). “We are not a minority” echoes the national unity perspective discussed above. However, national unity is now seen as a way to promote Coptic rights through the framework of citizenship rights. As such, the Coptic secular movement seeks to benefit from the opportunity of the 2011 uprising to promote the extension and enforcement of equal rights for all Egyptian citizens, instead of just fighting for the rights of the Copts. Accordingly, they have followed more or less in the footsteps of the Secular Coptic Front of the 2000s, locating the Coptic grievances in a wider Egyptian context, as Soliman suggested (2009: 153).

In the next sections I will show specifically how that happened.

### **7.3.2 Framing of grievances**

#### ***“Hold your head up high, you’re a Copt!”***

This first goal of the MYU echoes the goals of past Coptic collective action, namely publicly voicing those grievances that are felt by the Copts specifically. Informant 3 states that “Our main goal is equality for not only Copts, but all minorities in Egypt”. There are however few other minorities in Egypt, and the mentioned grievances are mostly specific to Copts. These are the legal problems with conversion from Islam to Christianity, kidnapping of girls and forcing them to convert to Islam, the building of Churches, and job discrimination in the public employment market (Informant 3, 2012a; Informant 13, 2013; Informant 14, 2012). These are well known concerns of the Coptic community, and will thus appeal to the community internally. A much repeated slogan that refers to Coptic rights is “Hold you head up high, you’re a Copt”, a play on “Hold your head up high, you’re an Egyptian” the motto of the 25 January uprising. This slogan also reflects another important goal of the MYU, namely to activate Copts. They encourage Copts to political activism and participation, helping others taking the step “out of the Church”. The interviews with the activists of the MYU, as well as outside observers, indicate that they have a limited ideology, but that they wish to increase the interest and participation in politics,

and political activism in the community. For example, they encourage party membership, but they do not advocate for specific parties. Informant 3 (2012a; 2012b) emphasized there are members in the union from all sorts of parties.

***“Down with the Brotherhood!”***

The Maspero Youth Union have decided not to acknowledge the Muslim Brotherhood as a legal organization, on the reason that “they don’t respect the Copts. They don’t believe in their rights. We think that any dialogue is just for the cameras” (Informant 3, 2012a). As such, if the Muslim Brotherhood wants to dialogue with the MYU, they will first need to acknowledge that Copts “are citizens equal to Muslims, and have the same right to reach even the higher positions, even president of Egypt” (Informant 3, 2012a). The MYU deals with all other organizations, on the precondition that they “believe in civil country and civil state”. The Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the Salafists, are framed as a threat, not only to the Copts, but to the Egyptian nation state:

“We think that they want to change Egypt’s soul ... [and] habits. We think the Muslim Brotherhood ... believe that Egypt must be a state from a large Islamic state, they believe that Egypt is not a country itself. ... [They] want something that is known as Khilaf, the Islamic kingdom. ... In Egypt, in Libya, in Sudan. They believe that it will be one country, which is led by Islam, and is led by Muslim Brotherhood themselves. ...”

The framing of the Muslim Brotherhood as an advocate of the caliphate pose an image of an organization that directly contradicts the MUY’s vision of a secular state. It is thereby pointed out as their natural opponent. “They have a plan of three parts. ‘Opening or invading Egypt’ ... ‘sitting in Egypt’ and ... ‘ruling Egypt’.” The main issue for the Muslim Brotherhood is to rule, not Egypt but the Islamic world” (Informant 3, 2012a). Informant 3 further expressed that this is known fact among the educated in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood is thereby fronted as an imminent and real threat.

The condemnation of the Muslim Brotherhood should be seen both as a genuine-felt fear for feature dominated by radical Islamists, but also as an approximation to the rest of the secular opposition-liberal opposition. By this view of the Muslim Brotherhood, the MYU is siding with parties such as the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, Muhammed El Baradei’s Constitution Party and the Free Egyptians Party, all of which appeals to a broader constituency than the Copts. These other opposition movements do not necessarily resemble the MYUs perception that the Muslim Brotherhood is opting for a return to the Ottoman-era caliphate. Yet, they unite in their

promotion of separation between religion and politics, and strong opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood. As such, opposition to the Brotherhood-regime has an appeal that stretches beyond the traditional frames of Coptic discrimination. This is an important feature of framing processes, as they seek to bring attention to the causes of a movement or SMO to as many people as possible (McAdam et al. 1996: 16). Another advantage of this approach is that the Copts will strengthen the prospect of a united opposition that can mobilize across societal cleavages against a common opponent.

A possible disadvantage of the participation in the broader opposition movement is that the specific Coptic grievances may be lost in the mixture of agendas that are promoted within it. In the opposition marches I observed in November in 2012, various participants promoted everything from socioeconomic deprivation (Informant 21, 2012), to rights of journalists (Informant 22, 2012), to the exclusionary politics of the brotherhood regime (Informant 23, 2012). This reflects the problem with particularistic agendas that appeared after the fall of Mubarak. Everyone could agree that Mubarak had to go, but once the pharaoh fell, the revolutionary movement quickly disintegrated (Albrecht, 2012: 264).

### **7.3.3 The dual purpose of the Maspero Youth Union**

From the discussion of framing of opportunities and grievances above, there seems to emerge a tension between the confessional, nature of fronting Coptic grievances, against the secularist aims of being a part of the wider secular opposition movement. This echoes the tension between the national unity and persecution perspective of the past. When I asked one of the founders to identify the goals and purpose of the MYU he put it this way:

“Some consider it a Coptic movement strictly and some view it as just a secular movement. If you consider it a Coptic union then the aims would be to fight for the rights of the Copts and their equality with their Muslim brothers in the country. I see it more as a secular movement ... and its main goals are this and equality in general” (Informant 14, 2012)

As such, the MYU plays a dual role where it tries to address the grievances of Copts and at the same time represent the Copts in the national opposition movement. The Copt-specific goals are fronted in specific forums, such as Egypt’s human rights organizations and at press conferences with other minority interest groups (Informant 24, 2013; Nakhla, 2012). In the wake of sectarian clashes, the MYU has also been working as a mediator between the involved parties. In an incident in the village of Dashour (see Al-Ahram, 2012), the MYU negotiated between the

involved parties. Allegedly, the government wanted to settle the dispute through the local bishop, which did not result in a solution. In order to arrive at a solution without referring to the Church, the MYU involved themselves as mediators (Informant 3, 2012a).

### **7.3.4 Framing processes in the Church**

After the visible dissension between the Coptic community and the regime in the funeral after the Alexandria church bombing, the Church had adopted a conciliatory tone to restore stability. When plans to stage a protest on 25 January became publicly known, the Church rejected the idea. The Patriarch distributed a message to local churches to convince people to not go to such protests, and stay at home. As an alternative, Shenouda launched the campaign “Let’s pray for Egypt”. Additionally, the church issued various media statements and Church publications that used biblical references to urge for calmness. These efforts had limited effects: when 25 January came, many Copts chose to disregard the services of prayers (Iskander, 2012: 162-163). When it became apparent that the demonstrations were continuing and expanding, Shenouda appeared on television, reiterating his total support for President Mubarak. In the wake of Mubarak’s resignation, the Church was quieter in its public statements. When power was transferred to SCAF, the Church was quick in expressing support to the new rulers, and at the same time pay tribute to those who died in the uprising (Iskander, 2012: 168). However, after Shenouda admitted to the protesters on 15 May that their demands were legitimate, the Church kept far more aloof from politics.

The next clear observation of an attempt to frame the situation came on the eve of the enthronement of the new Pope Tawadros in November 2012. In an interview with al-Jazeera Bishop Angelaos stated that

“We need to get back to where we were on the first days of the uprising, when people were flying Egyptian flags and it didn’t really matter what religion they were ... we’ve had Christian-Muslim relations in this country for 1300 years... so I don’t think that’s the issue. The issue now must be concrete policy to move this ahead. ... try to ascertain a reality that is one nation respecting everyone the same, respecting human rights, respecting civil liberties, and holding everybody accountable at the same time”

The call for national unity is similar to the earlier stand of the Church. However, in there is a new element of human rights and civil liberties within the nationalism that is now promoted. When the interviewer asked the bishop how Tawadros would tackle the challenges that face the Copts, Angelaos called for citizenship rights to be fronted by the government and said that “the

Church don't want to get involved in politics". His tone was also markedly soft, when he was confronted by issues such as the marriage and personal status law, as well as the democratic deficit in papal and lay council elections, and promised that these matters would be addressed under Tawadros. Furthermore he stated "with the uprising we saw, months ago, there has been a real fear barrier that has been broken with all Egyptians. That need to be harnessed, otherwise it is going to turn into an anarchy" (Al Jazeera, 2012: web). The last statement resonates with the observation in the previous chapter. Indeed, under the new papacy the Church seem to be contribute in the harnessing of Coptic civil society.

## **8. Explaining the Coptic secular movement**

### ***The onset of communal group collective action***

It is hard to explain the causes of the al-Nabaa demonstrations in 2001, the first occurrence of Coptic collective action in recent history. The al-Naba incident however provides two important lessons: first, communal grievances, in the form of violent attacks and fatal discrimination, or steadfast alignments between the communal leadership and the incumbent regime, do not provide a sufficient explanation for Coptic collective action. Grievances had persisted for many years without provoking any action. Moreover, when collective action came about, discouragements from the Pope on behalf of the regime was not enough to calm the protests. Second, threat, and the perception of threat, is of vital importance. In the preceding Coptic revival the Church had framed Islam and Islamism as an outside threat to the Coptic community, while at the same time maintaining a nationalist façade. The low-scale war of attrition during the 1990s taken into consideration, this is not surprising. With the cessation of hostilities after 1999, the Copts perceived the situation as safe enough to engage in collective action. This resonates with the Almeida (2003), and other scholars of social movements in authoritarian contexts, who hold that threat is vital to the explanation of collective action in such regimes. However, in the Coptic case, threat comes from other parts of society, not from the state, as Almeida posited.

Like Tarrow (2011:5) argued, the repertoire of collective action is a learning process. The al-Nabaa incident was important in sowing the seeds for further voicing of Coptic grievances. Throughout the 2000s Coptic activists built on their repertoire of contention, while remaining closely linked to the Church. The display of unity between religion, Church, and activists remained an important ingredient in the framing of collective action throughout the decade.

### ***A secular turn***

In the mid-2000s came the first seeds of a further development of Coptic collective action. Critics of the Church and regime organized in the Secular Coptic Front. New ideas about Egyptian citizenship were formulated, although not penetrating Egypt's thick smog of nationalist rhetoric. These were also the scarce beginnings of independent organizational development. The resourceful individuals of the Coptic community had for a long time been bound up in the networks of the regime and the Church. The Secular Coptic Front publicly displayed effort to break with these previous ties, and spent resources and organizational skill on the development of an independent initiative.

Independent organization was further strengthened in the face of severe communal grievances in 2010, when the new organization Copts For Egypt took to the streets. In the middle of Cairo's Tahrir square, they expressed their discontent with the ability of the regime to tackle Coptic concerns.

### ***Revolution-ready***

When the 2011 uprising provided an environment for wide-scale collective action, the Copts were prepared. By now, they knew how to mobilize outside church grounds, and had ready notions of how to front Coptic demands through national politics, rather than through the Church. The months after the 25 January uprising saw a complete reshuffle the Copt's political context, which happened to turn out in favor of a Coptic secular movement. First, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood offered the movement an opponent that they have in common with the rest of the Egyptian secular opposition. Second, the passing of Shenouda and enthroning of Tawadros as the new Patriarch signaled the emergence of another ally. Tawadros has announced his unwillingness to deal with politics, despite the Brotherhoods effort to engage in the traditional Church-regime alliance.

“The old generations between Copts has been raised inside the Church. Dealing with the church as the only the soul representative for them. If they need their rights they ask the church for the rights. If the government needs one or two candidates to be ministers, they asked the church to nominate. ... The old generation was very loyal to the church, and they listened to it and obeyed it. Concerning the new generation, they destroyed everything. They start to play outside of the church; they start to go to national institutions to ask for their rights, they start to launch demonstrations, asking for their rights. ... We have a lot of Coptic Youth organizations, and at the same time we had a new pope. And the new pope is different from the last one. The new pope is trying to concentrate on the religious and spiritual issues and he respects very well the new generation, and he is ready to allow the new generation to play the political game. And now inside

the church we see change. We lost the charismatic pope, and now we have normal pope, trying to concentrate on the spiritual issues to build up the Church, and at the same time we have a new regime in Egypt, and a new generation of Copts” (Informant 13, 2013).

This quote illustrates how the Church has changed its role in Egyptian Society.

### ***The role of the Church***

In the three analysis chapters above, the Church is subject to considerable discussion. This is because the Church has fulfilled multiple roles. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the central clergy as an “elite alliance” or the Church as a “mobilizing structure”. At times the Church performed both functions. What seems to emerge after the discussion of the Church in all three chapters, is that Shenouda clearly was a client of President Mubarak, and all other functions of the Church must be seen in light of that fact. This gave the Church’s influence on politics, and ability to fulfill the needs of the Coptic communal group. However, the emergence of Coptic collective action did not depend on the dissolution of this patron-client relationship. More, the collective action in the 2000s “supported” or supplemented the Church in pushing for regime concessions, using Church grounds as a space for mobilization. Neither was the secular turn of collective action dependent on the breaking of the Church-regime alliance. Rather was it the visible neglect on the part of the regime to protect the Coptic communal group from attacks and discrimination. One must remember that Shenouda was prepared to hold on to the Church-regime alignment, even after Mubarak had stepped down.

### ***Defining the secular Coptic movement***

Now, what justifies the definition of a Coptic collection action subtype as “secular Coptic movement”? The first observation that justifies the term secular, is that Coptic collective action moved from Church grounds and into the streets, and further declared its independence from the Church. This stands in contrast to the previous incidents of Coptic collective action that was distinctly confessional, fronting Coptic grievances and defending the Church, often protesting on its behalf. The second observation that justifies the term secular is that the movement adopted a principle to work against Church involvement in the state, and work for the formation of a secular state. They also adopt other goals that coincide with the rest of the secular opposition in an ad-hoc fashion. Secular Coptic contentious collective action is a *movement*, because of its achieved degree of organization. The Maspero Youth Union is the main organizational body. Albeit small, in terms of how many members who show up for organizational meetings, it has the capacity to



mobilize thousands for street activism. It can also be seen as part of the wider secular opposition movement because of its high capacity for cooperation with other secular organizations and parties.

My findings do however suggest that Coptic grievances always serve as a backdrop. Discrimination, sectarian and political violence, and acceptance as equals in the state remain the underlying issues, and the basis for any Coptic movement. However, structural blockages have prevented them from being voiced. The patron-client networks of the regime coopted both the Church leadership and the Coptic upper class.

The cooptation of the upper class meant that the resourceful people who could have used their organizational skills and financial resources to back up SMOs are separated from the grass roots that are more likely to feel the grievances of discrimination in their everyday lives. As such, this dimension of opportunity structure is intertwined with the two other variables. The clientelist alignment of regime and elite classes inhibited the resources of potential donors to reach the informal networks that may have been capable of forming social movement organizations – the alignment inhibited development of mobilizing structures. Secondly, the elites are disconnected from the radical framing of grievances. One thing is that they might be relatively isolated from feeling and observing grievances first hand, another is that they subscribe to a different discourse of how to address the grievances. The disunity of the Coptic communal group was thereby divided in separate ways of framing both grievances and opportunities.

## **9. Conclusion**

This thesis provides an explanation for the development of the secular Coptic movement by analyzing the shifts from no collective action at all in the 1980s and 90s, to sectarian collective action in the 2000s, and furthermore to secular and quite organized collective contentious action in the post-2011 context. To explain this development the thesis has built on variables drawn from social movement theory.

The main part of the data material that was analyzed is made up of secondary sources. Yet, the analysis of the very recent developments in 2012 could not have been accounted for without the imputation of interview data and personal observations. The total description of the Coptic movement therefore not explains not only the primary reasons for the development of Coptic collective action, but also how the movement works today, compared to previously.

Chapter 5 found that the reforging of the Church-state alliance in the 1980s and the strengthening of Church authority absorbed nearly all forms of contentiousness from 1981 to 2001. The environment of a repressive state fighting an Islamist insurgency also contributed to the unavailability of public space for Copts. When the insurgency was over at the beginning of the 2000s, Copts found back to the streets. During the uprising in 2011, Coptic activists displayed a complete disobedience towards Church authority. Meanwhile, the Patriarch of the Coptic Church held on to his alliance with the President until the bitter end of the regime, and attempted to transfer the same alliance to the next military rulers. Only with the inauguration of a new Pope in 2012, the first steps in burying the old Church-regime pact was taken.

Chapter 6 found that the overreaching authority of the Church, helped by strong spiritual revivalism in Egypt, channeled all sorts of civil activities into the Church in the first time period. Much of the collective action in the 2000s was developed, and often confined to, Church grounds. However, the 2000s was the decade when Copts “came into the streets”. The collective action took more organized forms towards the end of the decade. The Maspero Youth Union is the most prominent of the new youth organizations, with bonds to secular political parties as well as the Church.

Chapter 7 analyzed framing processes by looking at discourses, the framing of specific events of collective action, and the framing processes in the Church. I argued that the grievances, although always on top of the posters during demonstrations, is a necessary but insufficient condition for collective action. Sectarian violence and discrimination was high during the 1980s and 1990s, but yet there was no collective action. After 2011 the framing of grievances in many ways was radicalized. The Maspero Youth Union adopted the goals of a secular state, denying the Muslim Brotherhood a legal place in Egyptian politics.

A crucial difference from before to after the turn of the millennium, was the quelling of the Islamist political violence and the relative increase of public safety. This is likely to have allowed the Copts to step out of the Church (if not completely off church grounds), and express their demands publicly. Cracks in the church-state alliance in the time before the January revolution ensured the wide Coptic participation in the uprising, and subsequent increased levels of organization and secular framing. The innovation in information techs is known to have contributed to the occurrence of the Arab spring overall, but to the Copts it had an additional effect, by allowing a stronger connection to the diaspora, and a transfer of a discourse that framed

the Coptic grievances in a language of human rights. The Maspero Youth Union has chosen to adopt a secular framing of their demands.

## 10. Appendix

**Table 4) Coding of variables ‘Protest’ and ‘Rebellion’**

<b>Protest and rebellion follow these guidelines:</b>	
1.	Protest and rebellion initiated by organizations that claim to represent the group’s interests and directed against governments that claim to exercise authority over the group is reported for each year in which it occurs.
2.	The de facto government is recognized for the purposes of these data. “Government” is defined as the body that exercises authority/control over the majority of the country. For example, Taliban was the de facto government in Afghanistan in 2000 even though it was not recognized by the world community.
3.	Protests on behalf of the group that take place outside of the group’s home country are not included.
4.	The most serious manifestation of each type of protest or rebellion is reported for each year.
5.	Positive evidence is used to report these variables. These data do not assume that action from one year carries over into the next.
6.	Protest and rebellion are distinct and may occur without the other.
7.	General protests or rebellions (i.e. those carried out by the general populace as opposed to only group members) are reported if a) group members are present in substantial numbers, and b) the anti-regime action includes issues of particular concern to the group.
8.	General protest or rebellion severity counts all participants, not just group members.
<b>CODING OF PROTEST</b>	
0	None reported
1	Verbal opposition Requests by a minority-controlled regional group for independence (public letters, petitions, posters, publications, agitation, court action, etc.).
2	Symbolic resistance Sabotage, symbolic destruction of property OR political organizing activity on a substantial scale (e.g. sit-ins, blockage of traffic).
3	Small demonstrations A few demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, the largest of which has total participation of less than 10,000
4	Demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, the largest of which has total participation between 10,000 and 100,000
5	Large demonstrations Demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, the largest of which has total participation over 100,000
<b>CODING OF REBELLION</b>	
0	None reported
1	Political banditry, sporadic terrorism (fewer than 6 events)

<b>2</b>	<b>Campaigns of terrorism (more than 6 events)</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Local rebellions</b> Armed attempts to seize power in a locale except cases that are the beginning of a protracted guerrilla or civil war during the reported year.
<b>4</b>	<b>Small-scale guerrilla activity</b> Includes all three of the following traits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fewer than 1000 armed fighters</li> <li>• sporadic armed attacks (less than 6 reported per year)</li> <li>• attacks in a small part of the area occupied by the group (or in one or two other locales)</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<b>Intermediate guerrilla activity</b> Includes one or two of the defining traits of large-scale activity and one or two of the defining traits of small-scale activity
<b>6</b>	<b>Large-scale guerrilla activity</b> Includes all three of the following traits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more than 1000 armed fighters</li> <li>• frequent armed attacks (more than 6 reported per year)</li> <li>• attacks affecting large part of the area occupied by group</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<b>Civil war</b> <b>Protracted civil war fought by rebel military</b> Has all the characteristics of large-scale guerrilla activity, plus rebels control large scale base areas that are secure over time

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*Source: Minorities at Risk Project (2009a: 21-22)*

**Table 5) Informant code scheme**

Informant number	Description (in thesis)	Place of residence	Class <sup>44</sup>	Interview Dates	Interview Lengths <sup>45</sup>
1	Politically engaged non-activist, Copt	Giza/Cairo	Middle	18.11.2012	0:46:00
2	Coptic Bishop	Upper Egypt	Clergy Elite	21.11.2012	0:36:46
3	Activist - leadership in Masspero Youth Union, Copt	Cairo	Upper Middle	a-28.11.2012 b-14.12.2012 c-16.01.2013	a-1:16:14 b-1:09:29 c-0:32:11
4	Party Leader of ..... , Copt	Cairo	Upper Middle -	01.12.2012	0:57:10
5	Human Rights Defender, Copt	Cairo	Upper Middle	03.12.2012	Not rec.
6	Human Rights activist, Copt	Cairo	Unknown	07.12.2012	1:23:31
7	Human rights activist and member in Masspero Youth Union, Copt	Cairo	Unknown	07.12.2012	1:23:31
8	Priest	Omraneya, Cairo	Middle	06.12.2012	0:48:29
9	Female activist -Political party and organization member, Copt	Cairo	Middle to upper-middle	05.12.2012	1:39:09
10	Male activist - Political party and organization member, Copt	-	Middle to lower-middle	05.12.2012	1:39:09
11	Activist in Salafeya Costa Movement, Copt	Cairo	Upper Middle	04.12.2012	1:36:25
12	Church charity worker, (activist) and business man, Copt	Giza/Cairo	Upper Middle	08.12.2012	1:29:41
13	Ahram Center Political Analyst, Former MP, Social Dem. Party Leadership, Copt	Cairo	Upper Middle – Intellectual	08.01.2013	0:29:18
14	Masspero Youth Union activist, Copt	Cairo	Unknown	10.01.2013	1:17:00
15	Politician in Social Democratic Party, Copt	Cairo	Upper Class	11.01.2013	0:22:17
16	Party Secretary in Social Democratic Party, Copt	Cairo	Unknown	15.01.2013	Not rec.
17	Politician in Social Democratic Party, Copt	Cairo	Unknown	15.01.2013	Not rec.
18	Journalist in “Watani”, Copt	Cairo	Middle	03.12.2012	Not rec.
21	Protester	-	Lower- Middle Lower	30.11.2012	0:06:00
22	Protester, Female Journalist	-	Middle	30.11.2012	0:02:00
23	Protester, Male, Christian	-	Middle – Upper	30.11.2012	0:01:00
24	Maspero Youth Union activist	Cairo	Middle-Upper	27.11.2012	0:09:39

<sup>44</sup> By observation of researcher

<sup>45</sup> “Not rec.” means that the interview was not digitally recorded.

## 10.1 Interview Guide

### General Information

1. Date/time/place:
2. Interviewee number:
3. Gender:
4. Education:
5. Civil status (married/unmarried/children):
6. Impression of social status:

### Introductory questions

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
  - What is your city of birth
  - Family – brothers/sisters/ live with mum and dad?
  - What interests you/ hobbies?

### Round tour questions

1. Political involvement of interviewee
  - a. Member of movement?
    - i. Issues of movement
    - ii. Strategies for achieving these issues
    - iii. Religious affiliations
    - iv. Does the movement listen to the views of religious leaders in political issues?
    - v. If copt
      1. Impact of new pope
    - vi. Member of other organization prior to the maspero massacre?
  - b. Member of religious community?
    - i. If copt:
      1. What should be the role of the pope politically?
      2. How do you view the political role of former pope Shenouda?
      3. Do you think that the relationship between the church and politics will change under the new pope?
  - c. Blogger?
  - d. Writer?
2. Political views of interviewee
  - a. What is the most important political issue for interviewee?
  - b. Other important issues
  - c. Share views with friends/ diversity of political opinion in social sphere
  - d. What is your relationship with the church?
  - e. Do you agree with the Church in political issues? Explain
  - f. Do you think the new pope Tawadros will involve himself in politics?
3. Information about the Coptic community
  - a. Most important political issues for Copts
  - b. Do you think these issues have changed after the 2011 revolution?
    - i. How?
  - c. Other movements that you know of that work with these issues?
  - d. How do Coptic organizations work now, as compared to prior to the 2011 uprising?
  - e. Is there any cooperation between political organizations and the church?
  - f. Strategies by movements

- g. Should Copts work together with politics or with others? Why? Why not?
- h. What is your impression of average copts relationship to the Church?
- i. What is your impression of average copts relationship to politics?
- j. Does the Church still have a lot of authority in politics, presuming that you think it ever had such authority? In any case, how is this happening?
  - i. Authority to speak in government
  - ii. Authority over copts political opinions
  - iii. Authority over political organizations

**Finishing questions**

Add anything for the record?

Tips about other respondents?

Meet again?



## 11. Literature

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