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Who Speaks for Coptic Rights in Egypt Today? (2013–2021)

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Abstract: This paper explores the nature of Coptic struggles for religious equality in Egypt in the period between 2013 and 2021. The key research question informing this paper is: in a context where the space for civic action to demand rights for equality and religious freedom is deeply circumscribed, who fills the vacuum of mediating Coptic grievances and what are the implications for institutionalizing religious freedom and promoting the greater public good? The methodology informing this paper is a multi-scalar linking national level political analysis of the relationship between the President and the Patriarch with the relationship between the church leadership and authorities in the governorate of Minya and its implications for local level governance of sectarian violence against Copts. The paper makes three key propositions. First, the relationship between the President and the Pope cannot be assumed to be a proxy for state-church relations more widely because the positively demonstrated political will of the President has not led to the institutionalization of religious equality at different levels of governance. Second, the assumption of Bishop Makarious of a representational role in defending and promoting the rights of Copts has led to a trade off in institutional rights encroaching on the principle of ecclesiastical affairs being free from governmental meddling. The third proposition is that the political vacuum created by the elimination of mediation of rights via civil society actors has not only negatively affected opportunities for championing the institutionalization of rights at different levels but has also wielded a loss for the promotion of public good more broadly.

Keywords: Copts; equal citizenship; religious freedom; Coptic movements; Egypt

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The situation with respect to religious equality in Egypt today is a deeply contested one, depending on whose interpretive lens informs the analysis and the time frame that is under study. The key research question informing this paper is: In a context where the space for civic action to demand rights for equality and religious freedom are circumscribed, who fills the vacuum of mediating and representing Coptic grievances in contemporary Egypt since 2013?

In order to address this question, a case study is presented of the responses to the occurrence of sectarian assaults against Copts in the governorate with the highest levels of assaults on Copts, Minya. The responses of the Pope to the occurrence of sectarianism broadly is contrasted with that of Bishop Macarios, the then acting Metropolitan Bishop for Minya in the period from 2013–2020. Bishop Macarios' tactics diverged from those of the Coptic Orthodox Church leadership when engaging with the authorities in Egypt and represents an anomaly in its defiant character. However, although an anomaly, the case study was chosen on account of its illumination of the chasm between a positive rhetoric on the part of the President towards the Copts at a national level and the systemic forms of discrimination that infiltrate local level governance in handling sectarian violence. It is also highly revelatory in showing the predicament that affects dissenting ecclesiastical voices that openly challenge the authorities both for themselves and for the church as an institution. It also points to the dire consequences of circumscribing the space for Coptic civil society in speaking on behalf of Coptic citizens.

The first part of the paper briefly describes the conceptual framework informing the study as well as the methodology, the second part describes the emergence of the

alliance between Pope Tawadrous and President Al-Sissi in 2013 and its consolidation over the years that followed and the contextual dynamics informing the mediation of institutional freedom of religion. The third part describes the escalation of tensions between Bishop Macarious and the political and security institutions since he assumed office, their drivers and implications for institutionalizing religious equality. The final part offers an analysis of trade-offs of different pathways of institutionalizing religious freedom and their implications for a number of factors associated with the public good.

1. Conceptual Framing and Methodological Approach

The question of how institutional religious freedom contributes to the greater public good in contemporary Egypt necessitates some level of unpacking of the concepts of institutional, religious freedom and public good. The concept of institutions can be defined in many different ways, our framing draws on Douglass North's framing as

> "the rules of the game in a society; more formally they are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interactions. They structure incentives in exchange, whether political, social or economic. Institutional change shapes the way societies evolve through time, and hence, is the key to understanding historical change". (North 1992, p. 477)

While North, a co-recipient of the 1993 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, has been most renowned in the realm of new economic institutionalism, his work has also shaped understandings of political dynamics in particular with respect to understanding "how norms, beliefs, and violence sustain the privileges, advantages—and power—of some groups over others" (Levi and Weingast 2019, p. 216).

Douglass' conception of institutions informs our analysis of how the rules of the game operate with respect to institutions in Egypt such as the church, the security apparatus and Coptic associational life. Conceptualizing the institutional in terms of the rules of the game enables a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of religious freedom in practice in two fundamental ways. First, it enables us to consider the influence not only of the formal rules inscribed in laws, policies and decrees but also informal rules in the form of informal settlements, inherent norms and behind the scenes mediations. This is critically important in the context of Egypt since, aside from the political will of the President, it is the security apparatuses that are the key players governing relations between state and church, and society on the Coptic question (see Guirguis 2016; Elsässer 2014; Tadros 2013a, Brownlee 2018 for details). The security apparatuses operate in an opaque manner, often mediating institutional relations through informal mechanisms of power. Moreover, the concept of a game allows for an exploration of power relations in a non-static, dynamic manner. In the context of Egypt, it would be far more theoretically and analytically useful to consider trade-offs between different rights and freedoms in a dynamic manner rather than a set of coherent rights that neatly feature in a holistic checklist. It would be far more analytically useful to understand trade-offs between different sites and spheres of power than to think in terms of coherence across actors and policies, given the messy and contradictory nature of power configurations on the ground.

In terms of the concept of freedom, we borrow from development scholarship once more, drawing on Amartya Sen's framing of freedom in terms of positive and negative capabilities (Sen 2001). Positive freedom is what people are enabled to do or have the capacity to do. For example, in this paper, we explore the ability to enjoy freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of gathering etc. However, Amartya Sen also speaks of freedom from negative forces, i.e., freedom from all kinds of repressions. For example, in the context of Egypt, for Copts, the freedom from experiencing terrorist attacks and militia attacks, freedom from exposure to unfair trials, etc. These two sets of freedoms are not mutually exclusive, for example, we need freedom of speech to press for accountability and freedom from hate speech that incites to violence. Here, the operationalization of institutional freedom for religious organizations as conceived by Shah (this volume) is

especially helpful. Shah conceives of institutional freedom of religious organizations in terms of

> the effective power of religious communities and organizations to be independent of control or interference by the state and other social actors and therefore to enjoy meaningful self-determination in the conduct of their "internal" affairs or self-governance as well as their "external" affairs or engagement with the wider society. To elaborate, institutional religious freedom is the presumptive right of a religious institution to be free from coercive interference on the part of individuals, social groups, governments, or of any human power in three main areas or dimensions: self-definition, self-governance, and self-directed outward expression and action. (Shah 2021, p. 4)

Durham's (2001) postulation of three dimensions for institutional freedom of organizations: the horizontal, vertical and substantive is particularly relevant here. The rules of the game informing the mediation of rights for Copts in contemporary Egypt have affected the vertical dimensions of institutional freedom of organizations, namely those that

> "pertain to a community's leadership structure, hierarchy, lines of authority, the training and appointment of ministers and leaders, the conferral of membership, and the disciplining of members". (Shah 2021, p. 4)

The paper extends the question of how rules of the game shaping the position of the Copts and the position of the church influence the public good. Public good in this instance is operationalized as per RFI's conception to comprise "a stable social order, a dynamic economy, a free and democratic political order, a robust civil society, and clean and transparent governance"[1]. In this paper, we argue that the circumscribing role of both state and church in relation to Copts involvement in entitlements-claiming via civil society has negatively affected the public good.

There are several methodological constraints hindering the examination of how the rules of the game within and between institutions in Egypt shape religious freedom for the Copts[2]. First, the practices of institutions such as the church and security apparatus are extremely opaque and therefore difficult to study. They are dynamic in how they operate at different levels, spaces and times. Second, undertaking empirical research in Egypt post-2013 is dangerous. The government discourages social science research generally (Sholkamy 2015). Third, press freedom is deeply constrained in contemporary Egypt, and there is substantial government-enforced as well as self-imposed censorship by the press. This limits the press coverage available on the state of religious freedoms in Egypt as well as other freedoms more broadly. Fourth, the political polarization between those that conceive of the ousting of Morsi as a coup and those that describe it as a revolution has coloured all analysis of contemporary Egyptian affairs in Western scholarship in a manner that renders the work deeply biased. The challenge is not so much the presence of diverging perspectives but scholars' lack of disclosure of how their personal standpoint on regime change influences their interpretation of events. For example, if scholars favoured the Muslim Brotherhood's rule, they are very likely to see anything that the current regime undertakes as damaging and oppressive. These factors greatly circumscribed the conditions under which this inquiry was undertaken.

Primary data were collected between 2019-end of February 2021 through interviews, participant observation in non-profit civic associational work in Egypt and reliance on key informants. On account of duty of care towards sources, all names have been anonymized. This may perhaps represent one of the limitations of this study, namely that there are very few references where the sources are cited. Secondary data sources in English and Arabic also informed this study and included scholarly articles and press reports. Caution was needed in analyzing secondary data sources, on account of their limited reliance on empirical data and lack of disclosure of standpoint.

The methodological approach pursued was multi-scalar: gravitating between the national level (Patriarch-President), the meso-level (Bishop-governorate level security

apparatus), and local level where sectarian violence occurs in villages and parts of towns. The choice of such a multi scalar methodology was informed by a number of considerations. First, in order to test one of the main propositions of this paper that the Pope-President alliance is not necessarily a proxy for state-church relations more broadly, it was necessary to explore relationships influencing institutional religious freedom beyond the persons of the Pope and President. In his engagement with local and security authorities at the diocese of Minya, Bishop Macarios diverged greatly in his engagement with the state authorities from the kind of rapport shown between Pope and President. Moreover, the study of institutional religious freedom required probing beyond national level discourses and practices because most of the violations of Copts' rights to religious equality happened at a local level, often in rural communities (though there have also been urban incidents in particular those involving terrorist acts). In this inquiry, a sub-governorate level was chosen for inquiry. The governorate of Minya has historically and in contemporary times experienced the worst incidents of sectarian attacks on Copts (Tadros 2013a). It also has the second largest concentration of Christians in Upper Egypt (Assuit having the highest). The concentration of Christians in Minya is so substantial that the Coptic Orthodox Church divided the governorate into seven dioceses, the most important and largest of which is the centre and its surrounding villages which is the focus of our study here. Minya governorate experienced several terrorist assaults as well as sectarian violence against Copts. By examining the institutional management of these attacks, it was possible to also draw conclusions on what enables or hinders religious freedom in that context. The time period covered in this study extended from July 2013 to end of February 2021. The rationale for choosing this timeline are associated with the emergence of a new political leadership in Egypt following the demise of the Muslim Brotherhood-led regime via the ousting of President Morsi in 2013, one which has remained in power to this day.

The Alliance between President and Pope

Egypt has one of the most ancient Christian populations in the Middle East, dating back to the fourth century (Atiya 1968, 1979). Today it is estimated that about 10 percent of the Egyptian population are Christian, of whom 90 percent follow the Coptic Orthodox faith and the remaining 10 percent follow the Protestant and Catholic faiths. After being ruled by a single authoritarian ruler, Hosni Mubarak, for almost thirty years (1981–2011), Egyptians rose in revolt, leading to his ouster 18 days later. The transition that followed was fraught with difficulties. The military ruled under the Supreme Council of Armed Forces from the time of the ouster in February 2011 up to June 2012, at which point the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohamed Morsi, won the presidential election. President Morsi ruled from July 2012 up to June 2013 when millions took to the streets to demand his removal and early presidential elections. After the military intervened, Al-Sissi, who was then the Minister of Defense announced a new roadmap on the 3 July 2013. The head of the Supreme Constitutional Court Adley Mansour was appointed as interim president until a new constitution and new elections are held. New presidential elections were held in May 2014, leading to the election of Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi as president, a position he has maintained since then.

The analysis of the situation of present-day Copts can lead to a number of contrasting conclusions. On the one hand, several international reports (such as Farouk et al. 2018) paint a picture of regression of the rights of Copts in comparison to under Mubrak's rule. In some narratives, such regression is suggested as a state-inspired infringement on the protection of Copts from attacks, in other narratives, such violations are presented as a microcosm of the overall encroachment on human rights more broadly in Egypt. On the other hand, there are narratives that see the situation of the Copts as enjoying more citizenship rights under Al-Sissi more than at any other time in history. In such narratives, the Copts are presented as being given a second chance to enjoy citizenship after having participated in the uprising of 2013 that brought the Muslim Brotherhood out of office (for example Pope Tawadrous, see below).

Whatever be the interpretive lens informing the analysis, the definitive facts are that Copts participated in large numbers in the popular uprising in 2013 that called for the ousting of President Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood leader (Tadros 2013b). Repression had increased under the rule of President Morsi in a manner that cannot be captured merely by counting sectarian-related rates of deaths or injuries. Open vilification of Christian students in public education institutions increased, including, at times, their segregation from Muslims. The kidnapping Christians for ransom rose alongside anti-Christian rhetoric in the media became more pervasive from 2011–2013. Most alarmingly, data from Egyptian press reports showed that the number of sectarian attacks rose from 45 in 2010 to 70 in 2011, the year of the revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak. In 2012, that number was up to 112. With the rise in sectarian violence in everyday life as well as in major incidents involving bloodshed, Copts joined in large numbers Tamarod, an anti-Morsi grassroots movement (Shafiq 2014, p. 97), while also playing very active roles in the Coptic social movements that emerged after the Egyptian revolution of 2011.

The ousting of President Morsi from office saw the beginning of a new wave of intense violence against Copts and the police and armed forces as part of the Islamists' vendetta against the ousting of President Morsi (Tadros 2013b). The Copts supported the new status quo and as a consequence were targeted as Christians by the pro-Morsi factions who claimed that the Copts were behind the revolt and are to be considered enemies of Islam. On 14 August 2013, the pro-Morsi protests at Rab'a and Al Nahda Squares in Cairo were cleared using excessive force by government security personnel, leading to the death of many protestors as well as several police officers. On the same day, pro-Morsi factions, attacked 64 places of worship, faith-based organizations, and private property were assaulted within 12 h in Minya alone. Coptic civil society, in particular the Maspero Youth movement, played a central role in documenting the scale of devastation, including looting, torching, and injury to individuals. The Copts expected that given the heavy price they paid for revolting against the Brothers, there would be a political will to institutionalize new governance policies that end sectarian violence and discriminatory practices. They soon realized that systemic discrimination in state and non-state practices are difficult to uproot.

Pope Tawadrous participated in the pre-ousting negotiations convened by the then Defense Minister Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi and which ended on 3 July 2013 with the announcement of a new roadmap for the country. Historically, the Patriarch/Pope assumed political representation for the Coptic community although towards the end of President Mubarak's rule and throughout the revolutionary phase of 2011–2013, political representation has become more multi-vocal (Sedra 2014; Ibrahim 2010; Du Roy 2016; Tadros 2009). However, across history and in contemporary Egypt, political representation of the Copts in Egypt at the level of the Patriarch is distinct from rights-claims-making (Farha and Mousa 2015). The question informing this paper is not who politically represents Copts, but who is engaging in public claims-making vis-à-vis rights, in particular when encroachments or violations occur.

After the formal ousting of the then President Morsi in 2013, the announcement of a new roadmap was made public by Al-Sissi in the presence of a number of high-level figures from the political opposition, the judiciary, the defence, and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and of course Pope Tawadrous. During the event, Pope Tawadrous very passionately spoke in favour of the new roadmap adding: "we are at a crossroads in the history of our beloved Egypt and the map for the way and the future occurred through the consensus of all present, and we put in it all the elements faithfully that ensures the welfare of the road for all Egyptians, through honourable people with no exception, we convened under the flag of Egypt and with it the eagle that we see represents its army which is the beacon of safety" (Badrawy 2016). In the context of a gathering of political and religious figures of the highest level, the non-participation of Pope Tawadrous in the pronouncement of Egypt's new roadmap on the 3 of July 2013 would have been an anomaly—an indication of either the exclusion of the Coptic Church from the new political settlement or its non-involvement.

Either way would have been negative for the Coptic Church and for an inclusive political settlement as a public good.

However, the strong endorsement of Pope Tawadrous of President Al-Sissi in the years that followed is in stark contrast with his rapport with the former president, Mohamed Morsi. Pope Tawadrous stance towards the former President Morsi was openly critical, with an intensity in tone and content that was exceptional for a pope to show a president. Following the assault on the Papal Cathedral in Egypt in August 2013, Pope Tawadros publicly accused President Morsi of failing to protect "a national symbol" (BBC 2013). No other Coptic patriarch since at least the beginning of the 20th century dared publicly contradict the authorities in a manner that suggests they are liars. The Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement in English (and no Arabic version) of their versions of events in which they presented the Copts who had convened at the Papal Cathedral as engaging in vandalism by attacking cars belonging to Egyptian citizens living in the premise (Tadros 2013b). Pope Tawadrous spoke in several media outlets, disclaiming the content of the statement and accused the authorities of seeking to deceive foreign governments. He accused the Muslim Brotherhood of wrongfully accusing the mourners who participated in the funeral held at the Cathedral of non-peaceful engagement. Pope Tawadrous said to the press on 26 April 2013 "the official accounts of clashes occurring at [St] Mark's Cathedral in Cairo are a matter of fabrication" (Odeh 2014, p. 199). For a Coptic Patriarch to openly accuse the regime in power of "fabrication" is no smaller matter especially since this was not leaked as being said in secret, but publicly and openly professed to the press.

Hence, it is difficult to portray the strong endorsement of Pope Tawadrous of President Al-Sissi as a reflection of the expected stance of a Coptic patriarch toward the position of the presidency in general. Pope Tawadrous' naming and shaming of President Morsi in national and foreign media and complete reversal vis-a-vis President Al-Sissi suggests it is the person, and not the position that has informed his stance. The relationship that developed between Pope Tawadrous and President Al-Sissi also marked a major departure from the turbulent relationship between his predecessor, Pope Shenouda III and the president at the time, Mohamed Mubarak. Despite Pope Shenouda's repeated endorsement of President Mubarak, the latter only met privately once over thirty years when he summoned him to the presidential palace in January 2011. In contrast, the number of meetings between Pope Tawadrous and President Al-Sissi have been countless. Relations between the Pope and President could be seen as the strongest that have emerged since the relationship between Nasser and Pope Kyrollos in the first part of the 20th century which were by many accounts very strong (Abdel-Fattah 2010, p. 108; Al-Feki 1998, pp. 41–43; Labeb 2012, pp. 51–53; Al-Manawy 2005, p. 60; Ibrahim 2010) (although some would argue that the relationship between present Patriarch and President is even stronger). Certainly, relations between Pope Tawardous and President Sisi are much stronger than those that existed between Pope Shenouda and President Mubarak. The latter was lukewarm and had times of tension, despite Pope Shenouda strong endorsement of President Mubarak (see Tadros 2009).

On a national level, there have been several positive overtures by President Al-Sissi towards the Patriarch and the Coptic church more broadly. The regular visits by President Al-Sissi to the Cathedral in Abbasiyya to wish Copts a Merry Christmas at each Christmas eve mass is a gesture that no other President has taken in the modern history of Egypt (Safwat 2020). Coptic Solidarity International, a Coptic advocacy organization based in the US has criticized the high-level publicity around President Al-Sissi's presence in the Coptic cathedral pointing out that President Naguib visited the (old) Cathedral over Christmas in 1953 and 1954 and that President Nasser inaugurated the opening of the cathedral in Abbassiya in 1968 (Coptic Solidarity International 2021). There are a number of caveats that need to be taken into consideration when comparing President Al-Sissi's gestures with previous presidents. The first is that the political environment in the 1950s-1960s was dramatically different to that today, insofar as the Islamists did not enjoy the political weight they do today, nor had their fatwas about how haram (religiously unlawful) it is to wish Christians a merry Christmas been in circulation. Second, it is the frequency with

which President Al-Sissi has frequented the cathedral during Christmas mass worship as if establishing a new tradition or norm that distinguishes this gesture from previous presidents which were considered one-off gestures. Third, the significance of President Al-Sissi's gesture assumed particular importance in the early years after the removal of President Morsi from office on account of its striking contrast to how his predecessor engaged with the Patriarch. The political significance of these visits is the recognition of the faith identity of the Copts as citizens. The religious significance is that it shows his defiance of Islamists and Muslim conservatives who consider it anathema in Islam for a Muslim to take part in or show approval of the religious practices of non-Muslims.

Symbolic gestures of recognition co-exist with systemic forms of religious discrimination. As will be seen below, President Al-Sissi's intervened in a number of local level violation of Coptic rights and overturned his own officials' stances. However, how Al-Sissi's manifestation of recognition of Copts translates into the institutionalization of religious freedom and how it can in turn translate into the promotion of public good is more complex because of the lack of opportunities of downward accountability (from the leadership to local governance institutions) and upward accountability (civil society mediating the demands of citizens to power-holders).

Since 2013, well before Al-Sissi was elected president, Pope Tawadrous expression of support for him has been ardent, consistent and unequivocal. At every possible opportunity, Pope Tawadrous has called upon Copts in Egypt and in the Diaspora to endorse President Al-Sissi. For example, as early as 2014, the Pope made no secret of the political orientation he wants Copts to adopt: in the lead up to the presidential elections, Pope Tawadrous said it was a patriotic duty to vote for Al-Sissi as president, well before the latter had formally announced his nomination (Kamel 2019). All of Pope Tawadrous' press statements and television appearances directed towards the Egyptian public have hailed President Al-Sissi's stir as one leading the country to a renaissance (Khalil 2018). Pope Tawadrous made several overseas trips and at every opportunity of engagement with officials, he praised President Al-Sissi's policies towards the Copts. For example when Angela Merkel visited Egypt in 2017 and met with Pope Tawadrous, he said to her that the situation of Christians has improved after 30th June 2013 and that "we live, Christians and Muslims, in harmony, love and joint social relations and we have a common history of understanding and cooperation . . . with its joys and pains of happiness and hardship". He then added that "from time to time, there are some problems because of poverty, ignorance or fanaticism or crowdedness, and the church tries to resolve these issues with the state through the parameters of one Egyptian family" (State Information Service 2017). In another visit to Europe, Pope Tawadrous said that Egypt has never seen a leader like Al-Sissi in its history (Al-Qods Al-Arabi 2019). In 2018, Pope Tawadrous travelled to New York in 2018 with the view to actively galvanize the Copts living in the United States to show their support for him. The Pope had instructed the bishops in the US to go to great lengths to press the parishioners to make public their endorsement of Al-Sissi by gathering in large numbers holding Egyptian flags to welcome him (Al-Jazeera Net 2018). When asked in a press interview whether he does not consider this as a political activity, he replied that it was not politics but patriotism.

When Pope Tawadrous was pressed by Copts in the Diaspora to explain what he makes of the terrorist attacks that have targeted Copts and the grave situation in many of the country's villages, he said "do no listen to all of the news said, in 99% of the news on facebook are lies and fake and thew news when it travels across the Atlantic from Egypt changes and arrives to you in a contorted way, saying that [situation in] Egypt is not good" (Tamri 2018).

In fact, Pope Tawadrous's endorsements have often focused on the person of President Al-Sissi. Pope Tawadrous speaks of Al-Sissi not as one with whom there is an entente around common interests but as one with whom there is an alliance on grounds of personal endearment. On several occasions the Pope has described Al-Sissi in public as "the skilful maestro" and proudly spoke of a "chemistry" between them (New Khalij 2019). In a context

in which the Patriarch is head of the church with the largest Christian followers in Egypt, a proclaimed sense of "chemistry" with the President of Egypt exemplifies a case of the personal being political. In other words, a personal connection with the President is a political declaration of a sense of affinity. However, it is important to note that among the ranks of the Copts with whom the author spoke, many interviewees consider Al-Sissi's positive overtures towards the Coptic church and its leadership to be genuine indications of the recognition of Copts as part and parcel of the nation. Simultaneously, interviewees point to the disconnect between a presidential recognition of their rights and the systemic discrimination that characterises state and non-state institutional practices towards Copts.

The fact that the Pope chooses not to act publicly as the mediator of Coptic grievances with respect to religious inequality or religious freedom infringements has elicited criticism from among the ranks of some Coptic youth in Egypt (who spoke anonymously) and among some Copts living in the Diaspora. The Pope's public denial of the presence of religious freedom violations and claims that reports of sectarian violence have no basis have enraged some Copts who have regarded him as a stooge to the regime (Tamri 2018). In September 2018, Pope Tawadrous' mocked Copts in the Diaspora for advocating on behalf of Copts whose rights are being violated in Egypt, making one particular statement that raised their ire: "There are no attacks on the Copts and the news that receives the Copts in the Diaspora happen to get reversed in the Atlantic Ocean" (i.e., changed over from the truth". He then mockingly said that the news gets "wet" as it crosses the Atlantic Ocean (quotes taken from Tamri 2018). Influential voices in the Coptic Diaspora such as Coptic activist and writer Magdy Khalil criticized the mobilization by Pope Tawadrous and the Coptic Orthodox Church of its followers in the United States to congregate outside the buildings where President Al-Sissi is to visit in the US to express support and endorsement for him (Tamri 2018).

There are tensions in the choice of roles Pope Tawadrous has assumed. If his support for the regime leads to the suppression of Copts who are demanding accountability, then ultimately this will eventually make him highly unpopular among those who believe in the autonomy of the church from the state. On the one hand, one argument is that the church is necessarily a civil society actor and as such is entitled to assume a mediational role in representing the needs of its adherents or members. The counterargument is that even if the Pope chooses not to publicly discuss Coptic grievances, he should leave the mediation and representation of Coptic grievances to civil society where women and men can speak on behalf of members of the communities and engage in claims-making as citizens, not as members of a religious minority. The Pope may maintain his alliance with Al-Sissi as a relationship of endearment between two official leaders while at the same time, refraining from denying the right to other Copts to make claims as citizens and members of civil society. In other words, while maintaining a positive high level political rapport with the president (and with the limitations this entails in publicly criticizing the regime), simultaneously allowing Copts to use civic space to advocate on behalf of their own rights.

Civil society is a most obvious choice as the realm of mediating citizen grievances in relation to the state. Egypt has had a long history of non-profit associational life that extends back to at least the 19th century when the first Coptic non-governmental organizations were formed. The apex of Coptic engagement in civic activism was reached between 2011 and 2013 when Copts participated in revolutionary pro-democracy movements as well as formed their own movements to champion the citizenship rights for Copts such as the Maspero youth movement, the Free Copts, Copts for Egypt and the Coptic union[3]. The most famous of such movements was the Maspero youth movement which had both lay and clergy leaders amongst its ranks and was able to galvanize thousands of Copts to take part in marches, sit-ins to protest against violations of rights (Du Roy 2016). Other movements were also established with a view of championing rights. These movements played several highly effective roles in relation to pressing for religious equality and religious freedom for all. The first of such roles was in pressing for accountability for violations of rights of Copts when they occurred. For example, the Maspero movement organised its first sit-in

in March 2011 in response to the burning of a church in Atfeeh, Giza and the expulsion of Coptic families. They demanded the opening of the churches that were previously closed by the state security, the issuance of a unified church law, and the holding to account of the perpetrators of violence. A delegation of youth from the Maspero movement were invited to meet with members of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) and the Prime Minister to negotiate. The outcome was that SCAF rebuilt the church and the families who were evicted were returned to their homes.

The second important role assumed by Coptic civil society is to withstand pressure from the church to concede to government attempts at treating them as religious, not civic subjects. In May 2011, there was another incident involving the burning of churches in Imbaba, Cairo and the Maspero youth movement and other Coptic movements that had been established since then went back to the streets to revolt. When the Coptic Church leadership pressed them to stop their demonstrations, they refused until some of their demands were met: a commitment to the rebuilding of the burnt churches and the arrest of some of the known perpetrators.

The third important role assumed by Coptic civil society between 2011–2013 is to promote not only the rights of Copts as equal citizens but their members and leaders were often active in other movements that promote democracy, inclusion and equality in Egypt. In that sense, there was a positive relationship between their role in the promotion of institutional religious freedom and important dimensions of the public good such as the championing of a free and democratic political order for all, independently of their religion.

The fourth critical role assumed by Coptic social movements in that revolutionary phase was to forge ententes and alliance building with sympathetic allies, be they the youth revolutionary movements or the leaders of the Sufi orders. Such cross-cutting collective action has helped to obstruct the image that they are only interested in advancing the rights of members who share their faith and contributed to the emergence of a broad-based counter-coalition against perceived sources of injustice. In that sense, they contributed to another dimension of the public good, namely the strengthening of a robust civil society.

Fifth, Coptic movements were also active in keeping a check on the political actions of Coptic churches, so that they would not be co-opted by the ruling powers. The Coptic protest movements together with leading Coptic figures played a decisive role in convincing the Coptic Orthodox Church to withdraw from the constituent assembly delegated by the Muslim Brotherhood-led government to draw Egypt's new constitution. At that time in 2011, the acting Pope Bishop Packhomious responded to the growing discontentment felt by the Coptic movements by organising a meeting in which 76 representatives from Coptic movements and civil society activists, media persons and legal experts were invited. Sixty-seven voted for withdrawal, three for freezing the membership and three to continue", she recounts. Bishop Pachomious responded to the pulse of the wide prevailing sentiment among Coptic activists by deciding to withdraw the Coptic Orthodox Church from the constituent assembly. Thanks to the withdrawal of all the Coptic churches (Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic), a domino effect was spurred, leading to the withdrawal of a number of pro-rights political parties and influential public figures from the constituent assembly, sending a strong message to those in power that the constituent assembly's legitimacy is compromised. By actively engaging the Coptic Orthodox church to participate in an open and transparent process of decision-making vis-à-vis participation in the constituent assembly, Coptic civic society contributed to another public good: the promotion of clean and transparent governance within the church and in politics at large.

Yet the role of Coptic civil society organizations and movements as mediators of rights came to a standstill by the end of 2013. The demise of Coptic civil society movements is a microcosm of the assault on civil society in Egypt more widely. The issuance of a new protest law in 2014 that introduced government authorization as a prerequisite for engaging in any collective public action thwarted activism for Copts and non-Copts. Moreover, in 2013, many of these collective actors were still at a nascent phase of development in terms of building a strong constituency base and they had not yet consolidated forms of strong

cohesive leadership. Further, they had not developed effective strategies against co-option by security agents or handling internal power struggles. Hence, by the end of 2013, the autonomous Coptic associational platforms for speaking on behalf of Coptic rights had waned and had not adapted by reinventing themselves.

The scope for the press and parliament to hold to account power holders for violations of rights, religious freedoms or otherwise between 2013–2020 also diminished. Informants working in the press have shared with the authors that Pope Tawadrous has colluded with the authorities to give a carte blanche to the suppression of Coptic voices of dissent. For example, one informant, a Coptic journalist mentioned that there is a great deal of self-censorship being exercised by the editors of newspapers in Egypt with respect to publishing any news or opinion articles that are critical of Pope Tawadrous or his policies. The journalist noted that the impact of such self-censorship has been to obfuscate discussions around how the church leadership handles sectarian violence experienced by Copts at a local level. In such a context, a real vacuum emerged domestically with respect to the mediation of grievances and representation of demands. When matters pertaining to the violation of rights on religious grounds, who would speak for the rights of Copts? Who would press for accountability? Who would proactively seek to institutionalize policies and practices enabling of inclusive citizenship?

2. Bishop Macarios, the Security Apparatus Struggle over the Visible and Invisible Sites of Power

Minya is both the name of the government demarcated "governorate" to which it appoints a governor but it is also the name of the largest city in this governorate. The governorate has one of the highest geographic concentrations of Copts in Egypt, estimated to account for roughly 30% of the governorate's population. On account of the large number of Copts and the vast geographic area, the Coptic Orthodox Church split the governorate of Minya into seven dioceses in 2013. The most important and largest diocese included the city of Minya, the town of Abu Qorqas and a very large number of villages and hamlets in the broader governorate. There were then six other dioceses all within the boundaries of the governorate of Minya. They include the dioceses of Maghagha, Bani Mazar, Matay, Samalout, Malawi and Deir Mawas. Here we focus on the diocese of the centre of Minya and Abou Qorwas (later referred to as just the diocese of Minya) as was the original diocese demarcations in 2013 (as will be shown the demarcations of this diocese changed in due course).

By the time the second Egyptian uprising had occurred in 2013, Bishop Arsanious, the Metropolitan Bishop in charge in Minya had reached the age of 83 and had been suffering from Alzheimers for some years. In 2002 Bishop Arsanious had requested from the late Pope Shenouda the appointment of a monk-priest Father Kyrollos El Baramousy to be stationed in Minya to support him in his work. In 2004 Pope Shenouda ordained Father Kyrollos el Baramousy giving him the name Bishop Macarios to support Bishop Arsanious in the management of diocese affairs in Minya. Bishop Arsanious was renowned for his highly participatory and inclusive style of governance (Hasan 2003). He provided Bishop Macarios with mentoring, support, and the opportunity to assume leadership. By 2013, Bishop Macarios had 9 years' experience in running much of the diocese affairs and was in effect in full control of the affairs as de-facto metropolitan bishop, only lacking the official title.

Bishop Arsanious' style of engagement with the authorities was one of high levels of cooperation and synchronization. Sectarian tensions which had historically been high in Minya (see Tadros 2013a for an analysis of the reasons in depth) had continued during Bishop Arsanious' time and yet there was no escalation of relations between Bishop Arsanious and the security apparatus. Bishop Arsanious sought to find ways behind the scenes to resolve the tensions in ways that did not allow for an escalation of tensions. This was partly possible because there were other actors of a Coptic and non-Coptic background who advocates for rights of Copts in Minya. Often, parliamentarians, human rights orga-

nizations and outspoken activists initiated campaigns to redress rights. The role of these actors, as pointed out earlier, came to a close post-2013 creating a very conspicuous political vacuum in who would be representing the rights of those who were victims of sectarian assaults.

Bishop Macarios' style of governance of sectarian relations was different to that of Bishop Arsanious and as early as 2006, he began to clash with the security apparatus on their management of sectarian violence in the diocese. However, in 2013 the contentious relationship became more publicly known. In response to the assaults that the churches in Minya experienced on 13–14 August 2013, Bishop Macarios took to the media to reprimand the authorities and fire services in Minya for failing to respond to the assaults on the churches in time to stop them from being torched or severely damaged (Al-Hayat Today 2013).

In October 2013, there was an assassination attempt made on Bishop Macarios as gunfire was shot on his car when he was making a pastoral visit to Copts in the village of El Serou. This may have represented the pinnacle of hostilities between the authorities in Minya and Bishop Macarios. Bishop Macarios went public with the attempted assassination attempt to which he had been subjected and rumours began to spread in Minya that the assassinators were not extremists. General Osama Metwaly, the director of Security [modeer el Amn] initially denied that Bishop Macarios had been subjected to an assassination attempt and claimed that what had happened was an escalation of sectarian relations in El Serou. General Metwaly indicated that it is likely that fire was shot in the midst of an escalation of sectarian tensions and added that Bishop Macarios should have informed the security apparatus of his intention to visit the village of El Serou especially since it was the site of communal tensions since 2006. General Metwaly indicated that the security apparatus will uncover who was behind the assassination attempt and bring them to justice. The assassinators were never caught (El-Miniawy 2013). Several analysts informally shared that this may have been the turning point in relations between Bishop Macarios and the authorities in Minya, becoming more openly antagonistic.

On the 20th May 2016, Soad Thabet, a Coptic Egyptian–seventy year old grandmother, was forcibly taken from her home by a mob of men, stripped entirely of her clothes and paraded in her local village of Karam Abou Omair in Minya (DuVall 2016). Soad Thabet was stripped by a mob of Muslim men incited to avenge the alleged rumour of an affair between her son and one of the men's divorcees. The Muslim woman in question and her family categorically denied any involvement with Soad's son and openly announced that the accusation was driven by financial extortion from Soad's son on the part of her former husband. The intention behind her stripping was to humiliate and denigrate not only her own family, but send a signal to the rest of the Coptic community of the power of the Muslim majority in the village to collectively punish and humiliate (Tadros 2016b). Soad Thabet who became popularly known as "the lady of Karam" had reported threats to the police the night before she was assaulted and had asked for protection in view of the growing warnings her family had received of their predicament if they did not leave the village. The fact that she and her family refused to flee made them a target of sectarian-motivated assault. The initial reaction by the authorities in Minya in the six days that followed was to deny the very occurrence of the assault. From day one, Bishop Macarios went public and shared the assault in its details with all the needed facts and evidence including videos. On the 26th of May 2016, the governor of Minya made an audio appearance on a television show 'Al Masouleyati' hosted by Ahmed Moussa claiming that the incident never happened and accused Bishop Macarios of spreading malicious rumours in Minya (On My Responsibility 2016 (television programme)).

On the 26th and 27th of May 2016 respectively, Bishop Macarios appeared on two television stations declaring that what is happening is a travesty of justice and the real culprits have not been arrested and he openly accused official authorities of not enforcing rule of law (Shortest Speech 2016). The media were in a bind. In the absence of media freedom, they could not openly contest the authorities' version as untruthful yet the space and time they gave Bishop Macarios to present the facts, show the videos and pictures

inevitably tilted public opinion to believing his version of the story. On the 29th of May 2016, President Al-Sissi publicly apologized to the Lady of El Karam in a televised address to her. He added that such acts should never have happened in Egypt and that the rule of law must be enforced and those who were responsible be brought to justice. Bishop Macarios thanked the President and said in a press statement "The President's words is the best response to those who denied the incidence and shuts the door before urfi solutions and obstructs the efforts of those who wish to do so" (Al-Minyawi 2016). The reference to those who denied the incidence undoubtedly was targeting the governor and the local authorities, thereby showing the President had believed his version of events and not theirs.

Bishop Macarios' reference to urfi solution was in relation to the informal reconciliation sessions that the authorities deploy to "resolve" sectarian violence against Copts. Since the Mubarak era, the security apparatus has obstructed the enforcement of rule of law and the delivery of justice in the courts for Copts by pressing for the informal resolution of cases of grievances of assault raised by Copts. The pressures on Coptic bishops and priests to participate in these committees has been enormous. Several priests have confided that when sectarian violence against Copts erupts, often the police arrest people from both sides (perpetrator and victim) and Coptic ecclesiastical leadership is under pressure to participate in these reconciliation committees in return for releasing the Copts who have been detained.

Between 2016 and 2017, there were a number of sectarian assaults on Copts in Minya, which involved the torching of houses and property, the expulsion of locals from their villages and a number of killings. These incidents were mostly not covered by the media, and could have been completely ignored, except that Bishop Macarios made a point of making these events publicly known. For example, in the village of Abu Yacoub in July 2016, a group of extremists attacked the houses of five Coptic families, completely destroying them, under the pretext (unfounded) that they were intending to convert one of the houses into a church. Bishop Macarios called for holding those responsible accountable so that others would not be emboldened to commit similar acts. He concluded his plea with an insinuation that his calls for accountability have not found any responsiveness from among the authorities: "We did not leave one authority we did not share our suffering with, and we continue to call for the enactment of the law" (Abdul-Ghaffar 2016).

In July 2017, security forces suddenly shut down a church in the highly impoverished village of Kedwan without any prior warning or precursors. A month later, on the 13th August 2017, Bishop Macarios issued a statement explaining that after a month had passed of attempts at resolving the issue, the Coptic parishioners in Kedwan do not have a place to worship. He explained that the security had said that that there are some people in the village who oppose the Copts worshiping there and their feelings must be taken into account. In the statement Bishop Macarios asked whether the security have any regard for the feelings of the Copts who have nowhere to worship. He said that while the constitution enshrines the right to worship for all citizens, this is not happening on the ground on account of the "personal will of some of the local officials". The naming and shaming of officials as being responsible for denying Copts the right to worship would have been considered incendiary by local authorities and was very much unlike the tactics of engaging with crises that would have been taken by other bishops in other surrounding dioceses in Minya. The authorities retaliated on the 20th of August 2017 by shutting down another church in the village of El Forn, arriving on Sunday morning and informing parishioners there will be no Sunday mass and they do not have the right to use the premise on the pretext that the building is not officially registered. Once again Bishop Macarios protested, this time specifically naming the security apparatuses as being responsible and adding that there are 15 places of worship that are closed by order of the security apparatus despite the church having submitted requests for their registration and added that there are 70 villages and hamlets in his diocese without the presence of any place of worship for the Copts. In a show of strength, the local authorities made it known that no matter what, the two churches will not be reopened. Suddenly a few weeks later in September 2017, President

Al-Sissi intervened and called for the opening of the two churches. Bishop Macarios openly thanked the President and all the officials, political and security in Minya in a statement to the press (Middle East News Agency 2017).

The reopening of the two churches occurred with much fanfare, very much disproportionate with the size of the congregation or community and in a press interview on the occasion, Bishop Macarios said that when filing complaints to the authorities about the closure of the churches, the church had demonstrated that the Muslims in the communities do not object to the Copts worshipping there. Given that the security justification for their closure was the opposition from within the community, the insinuation there was that the security was behind the decision and that their pretext was unfounded (Copts United 2017).

In that period Minya also witnessed two major terrorist attacks, the first in May 2017 and the second in November 2018 targeting Copts visiting the same monastery, that of Anba Samuel in the desert of Al Minya. The attacks left many injured and a number of deaths. Following the second attack, after the funerary prayers for the dead, Coptic youth took the caskets of the dead out of the church to the street in protest at the lack of security protection of the Copts in the governorate. In a context where the law prohibits any public demonstration or march without prior security approval, the Coptic youth display of anger in public in large numbers, shouting "with our spirit, with our lives we die for the cross" as well as slogans against security laxity. This defiance raised the ire of the security apparatus to higher levels, as they expected Bishop Macarios who had officiated the prayers in the church to call them to stop and he did not. Instead, he made statements to the press about the grief and pain that the Copts feel for the repeated attacks they experience (BBC 2018).

The intensity of tensions between Bishop Macarios and the security apparatus continued to rise with every new sectarian assault that occurred in Minya. In January 2019, sectarian tensions arose in the village of Manshe'at El Zaafaran, and the security intervened by closing in on the church and expelling the priest from the village. The conflict between the governor of El Minya and head of security on the one hand and Bishop Macarios reached new heights when a campaign began calling for the removal of Bishop Macarios from his post. For example, on one of the satellite television stations watched by Egyptians, El Mehwar, a renowned media person, Mohamed El Baz in hish programme *60 min* endorsed the campaign to remove Bishop Macarios as the source behind fanning the flames of sectarianism between Muslims and Copts in Minya (Ninety Minutes 2019).

The security which Coptic public opinion believed to be the driver behind the campaign to have him removed as bishop, did not only retaliate through smearing his character but also by blocking him being formally officiated as metropolitan in lieu of Bishop Arsanious who passed away in August 2018. Following the death of Bishop Arsanious, it became an open secret amongst the Copts that the Pope had not formally announced Bishop Makarios as the metropolitan bishop of Minya because of objections from the security apparatus. By government and church laws, all decisions regarding ecclesiastical appointments are supposed to be internal affairs of the church. The pope assumes all decisions pertaining to the appointment and officiation of bishops. However, in the case of Bishop Macarios, it is the first time in contemporary Egyptian history that the security is believed to have meddled in the Pope's appointments. In May 2019, Pope Tawadrous mentioned that since the diocese of Minya is so large, it will be split into two. This represented a blow to Bishop Macarios, who even if he were to be appointed metropolitan, would preside over half the size of the diocese of his predecessor. The second blow came in June 2019 when the names of the new bishop appointees were announced- and bishop Macarios' name was not one of them (Allam 2019).

In 2019, the Pope had a meeting behind closed doors with the priests who presided over parishes in the diocese of Minya, without their bishop. It was confirmed to the authors through highly credible sources that in this meeting the Pope openly told the priests that the security apparatus objects to the ordination of Bishop Macarios. The delayed appointment of Bishop Macarios confirmed for many Copts in Minya the rumour that the security continues to press against his appointment and the Pope is conceding to the pressure.

In April 2020, the press announced that it is expedient that the Pope would appoint Bishop Macarios as Metropolitan over the churches of Minya, while appointing two other bishops to preside over Abou Qorqas and the parishes of Minya east of the River Nile (Rahhuma 2020). The split of the diocese into three separate dioceses meant that the appointment of Bishop Macarios would be over a third of the geographic coverage of the original diocese. One can only speculate what went on behind the scenes. It is highly unlikely that the Pope was punishing Bishop Macarios for being a rebel bishop (rumours would have spread if that was the Pope's sentiment). Conversely, the theory that the Pope endorses the contentious position of Bishop Macarios but prefers to engage in a division of roles between them also seems unlikely. If that were the case, the Pope would not have conceded to the security apparatus blockage of the appointment of Bishop Macarios. There is no evidence that the Pope has shown any willingness to challenge the security apparatus and insist on appointing Bishop Macarios anyway. A more plausible explanation is that the Pope was reluctant to remove Bishop Macarios from Minya entirely since this would make him appear to be a puppet in the hands of the government. Notwithstanding, he did not wish to antagonize the security so he sought to arrive at a political settlement with them that would be mutually acceptable. It is possible the extensive delays in Bishop Macarios' officiation and his presiding over a very small diocese, a third of the original, were concessions to appease the security. On the 6th of April 2021, Pope Tawadrous after almost two years' delay, finally officiated Bishop Macarios over a third of the original diocese (Minya city and the villages to the west of the Nile River). It is unknown whether in return for acquiescing to his officiation, the security apparatus asked for particular compromises, such as that Bishop Macarios refrains from being outspoken. Only time will tell.

3. Prospects for Institutionalizing Religious Freedom and Promoting the Public Good

The role of Bishop Macarios in speaking out against infringements on the rights of Copts on religious grounds was extremely important at a time when other institutional pathways for holding the government to account had been completely blocked. It cannot be stressed enough that he was an anomaly amongst the other Bishops in being so openly vocal about violations of religious freedom. Bishop Macarios' championing of citizenship rights for Copts in Minya wielded some very positive impacts for the defence of institutional religious freedom. The first and foremost positive impact was the exposure of violations when the official stance was to deny the occurrence of incidence of sectarian violence against Copts and their subjection to any religious-based targeting and discrimination. Perhaps the incidence of the Lady of Karam was the most impactful as it led the President of Egypt to make an apology, despite the fact that the governor had denied the occurrence of the incidence in the first place. It is also on account of his determination for the truth to be out and ability to share tangible evidence to the media on several occasions that meant that the official narrative was easily disputed and challenged.

The second positive impact for institutional religious freedom is in denouncing the *lejan el solh* or the security-mediated reconciliation committees and pressing for rule for law and accountability. Bishop Makarios' resistance to all forms of pressure to endorse these unjust committees sent a strong signal to the priests at a local level not to bow in to pressure to take part in such committees. When informal reconciliation committees do not convene because the Copts refuse to participate in them, then matters need to be adjudicated through the courts. While this is not to suggest that the judiciary is a neutral institution, it does however, mean that the opportunity of appearing before the court is not denied or circumvented.

The third positive impact for institutional religious freedom is psychological for parishioners in his diocese who have experienced injustice. Bishop Macarios was dubbed by Copts both inside and outside Minya as "the Lion of El Saeed" [El Saeed being the vernacular term for Upper Egypt], with reference to his boldness, defiance, and refusal to yield to intimidation. For parishioners interviewed by the authors, they speak about

the importance of having figures in the church who are prepared to speak up for them, otherwise, who would? They say that when he reveals the truth publicly, it makes them able to walk in the streets with their heads high, knowing that they have a bishop who will press on for their rights. There are some in Minya who do not share these views and are concerned that in escalating relations with the authorities, it is the everyday poor Copts who may stand to lose more than gain, these were however, a minority of views that the authors heard. Reservations expressed regarding Bishop Macarios by parishioners were more often than not about other matters to do with governance in the diocese rather than his stance with the authorities.

The prospects of institutionalizing a culture of promoting religious freedom through figures such as Bishop Macarios whether in the church as an institution or in broader society have proven to involve painful trade-offs. In return for championing the rights of Copts, the institutional religious freedom of the church to govern its ecclesiastical affairs independently of government interference has been severely compromised. The vertical dimension of institutional religious freedom associated with choosing and electing its own religious figures has been violated with the security apparatus' prevention of the appointment of Bishop Macarios in the place of Bishop Arsanios as was expedient in 2018. His appointment over a third of the diocese, and almost two years later sets a dangerous precedent of security overreach in internal church affairs. The fact that it became an open secret within the Coptic church (and in fact among observers of church affairs more broadly including journalists, media persons and others in Egypt) that the delays in appointing Bishop Macarios was on account of security objections is not only an infringement on church autonomy: the optics were of a Pope acquiescing to the will of the security apparatus.

This shows that despite the strong alliance between the President and the Patriarch, this does not protect other tiers of church leadership from the overreach of a highly interventionist security apparatus. The heavy cost incurred from assuming a position of defiance may discourage other bishops from challenging the government in the same way. In other words, the replicability of this model of institutionalizing religious freedom by having more bishops assume the same role seems to be limited.

The other major limitation to the promotion of religious freedom or religious equality through the exclusive reliance on the mode of an outspoken bishop apparent in the case of Bishop Macarios is the costs not only for himself but for the Coptic people. If the security apparatus holds a vendetta against Bishop Macarios, it may play out not only against him personally, but also take the form of a collective punishment of all Copts living under his diocese. This may take the form of reluctance to intervene to enforce rule of law quickly when assaults occur against Copts or obstructing people's right to worship under many different guises. If the security apparatus chooses to punish the Bishop through parishioners, the situation may become very grave if this emboldens hard core Islamists to encroach on Copts.

It is also important to note that there are constraints on the geographic and political sphere of influence for any bishop to champion religious equality. Bishop Macarios is after all a metropolitan bishop. In other words, there is a diocese that falls under his jurisdiction. Shepherding his parishioners who live within the boundaries of his diocese by speaking up on their behalf may be anathema to the authorities but the legitimacy of his representational power or claims is indisputable. However, what happens if Bishop Macarios speaks up on behalf of Copts whose rights have been violated but who preside under another bishop's diocese? Would a national shepherding role be seen as more suited for a Pope than a Metropolitan Bishop? For example, in 2016 a [secular] popular Arabic online website pointed out that when a Coptic citizen Magdy Makeen was killed in a police station situated in al Mattareya, central Cairo, Bishop Macarios visited the family of the victim in their home to pay his respects. The editorial on the website wondered whether the Bishop was playing politics, rather than engaging in pastoral care since it is customary for priests to visit families to console and even if such a role was to be assumed

by a Metropolitan bishop, it would naturally be to members of his own geographic diocese (Al-Arab 2016).

Moreover, for institutional religious freedom to be a public good, its conception of the public good needs to be inclusive. While Bishop Macarios promotion of institutional religious freedom is highly inclusive of those who live in urban as well as rural areas, the wealthy and the very poor, the majority of interviewees pointed to his high levels of religious intolerance towards other Christian denominations present in Minya. Members of the clergy from both Catholic and Protestant denominations confided to the authors that not only has Bishop Macarios sowed religious strife amongst the different religious denominations but actively encouraged it. They believed that in the name of defending Coptic orthodox doctrine, he encouraged hatred among the Orthodox of Coptic Catholics and Coptic protestants.

Finally, the final consideration for the question of the promotion of religious freedom through church leadership does not so much have to do with the personhood of bishops but the very idea of whether it is right to have members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy assume representation for Copts in matters pertaining to citizenship, i.e., state-citizen relations. If Copts are Egyptian citizens whose rights are protected by the Egyptian constitution, should not their grievances be mediated and represented through civic measures? This is a long-standing debate that has extended on for centuries in Egypt and it is beyond the remit of this paper to tackle it, however, it does have implications for understanding institutional religious freedom and the public good. For some, the public good would be undermined if members of the ecclesiastical order speak on behalf of Coptic citizens, since this is giving a civil cause a religious cloak.

The question is whether Bishop Macarios filled a representational vacuum with respect to claims-making on behalf of Copts? Historically, Bishop Macarios' claims-making on behalf of Copts whose rights are encroached on preceded the containment of civil society by the government. As early as 2006, Bishop Macarios was speaking out on violations of Coptic rights. This was a period in which Coptic civil society, albeit constrained was active. While there is no evidence that he endorsed the presence of Coptic social movements or civil society organizations activity with Copts, it seemed that his voice existed alongside theirs. However, post-2014, it seems that the government crackdown on civil society meant that he became practically the only one still standing. Interviewees claim that Bishop Macarios does not have a favourable disposition towards Coptic civic activism through non-governmental activity or social movements in Minya.

Yet the revival of Coptic activism is a missing and necessary ingredient for the promotion of religious freedom in a manner that contributes to public good. The revival of Coptic civil society is not an alternative to the presence of other actors promoting religious equality inside and outside the church, but alongside it. Pluralism of voices, mediation and representation is critical on a number of accounts. The greater the diversity of actors speaking on behalf of Copts, the more likely the survival of claims-making for Copts because if one actor becomes the target of the security apparatus, there would be many others to contend with. In other words, when there are multiple division of roles among Copts vis-à-vis claims-making, this prevents the emergence of major voids in pathways of communicating grievances, which with time may then be filled with more radical voices. Thus, the presence of pluralist actors championing citizenship rights for Copts is critical for a stable social order, a key element of public good. The pluralism of actors and their prevalence in civil society is also critical for the promotion of a free and democratic political order, another dimension of public good, insofar as many of the youth movements such as Maspero and others that were active in 2011–2013 also contributed to the broader agenda of social, economic and political freedoms (Rowe 2020). Moreover, even if not all civil society is necessarily "civil" insofar as some organizations and movements wield norms and values that are antithetical to inclusion and equality (think for example of radical Islamist actors), nonetheless the proliferation of organizations, initiatives and platforms through which Copts can be active is critical for building a robust civil society, which is important for

contributing to public good. Finally, the presence of Coptic civil society activism is good for the promotion of clean and transparent governance within the church as an institution and in Egyptian politics more broadly. Yet in this current political environment, it is highly unlikely that the Copts would be given the space to engage in public action associated with revealing violations, mediating grievances and pressing for accountability. Ramy Kamel, one of the founders of the Maspero Youth movement was detained in November 2019 with "reported charges of membership of a terrorist organisation and use of social media to spread "false news threatening public order", which according to a statement by UN experts, "neither he nor his lawyers has seen documentation relating to the charges." The statement by the UN (UN) suggests that his arrest coincided with his application for a Swiss visa to speak at the UN Forum on Minority Issues. Informants in Egypt shared that his arrest may have to do more with a political position he espoused on a highly sensitive political matter in Egypt not associated with his activism on behalf of Copts. What is clear is that there has not been any *public* advocacy for his release by the Coptic Orthodox Church nor by any of its leaders.[4]

Perhaps until spaces for civil society activism open, finding the niches under the church umbrellas to engage in civic activism is a temporary interim pathway for expression of voice without becoming the target of the authorities. The strength of this is it may contribute to institutionalizing transparency and good governance within the church and enable the thorough documentation of religious freedom matters as well as provide leadership building opportunities for young people. On the other hand, the trade off is it may deny participants autonomy and self-governance and possibly circumscribe the extent to which they are allowed to engage in contentious politics.

4. Conclusions

The situation in 2021 is qualitatively different to that in 2011 not only because the spaces for civic engagement have become deeply circumscribed, but because the regional context has made many Egyptians especially Copts weary of the political alternatives to the current status quo. Neighbouring Libya and Syria have been ravaged by civil war, whose effects have been deeply felt by Egypt. For Copts, the experience of living under the Muslim Brotherhood generated a "never again" sentiment informed by the knowledge that the rise of an Islamist political power signifies a vendetta with the Copts for their endorsement of the ouster of President Morsi. In such a context, President Al-Sissi's political gestures of recognition towards the Copts as well as a number of political overtures are always compared to the policies of his predecessor (in particular the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, President Morsi) and considered in a favourable light by many Copts. However, there are limited opportunities of downward accountability from the presidential leadership to local governance institutions and upward accountability through civil society mediating the demands of citizens to the higher echelons of power. Institutionalization of religious freedom at the level of the local authorities including security actors has not occurred. At a community level, people ideologically affiliated to ultra-conservative groups such as the Salafis or ousted political actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood are still able to mobilize groups to launch attacks on Copts. Institutionalization of religious freedom has also been very limited (as of Early 2022) at a national level with respect to the level of the judiciary, legislature and executive organs of the state.

The mediation of Coptic grievances via open contestation in the singular case of Bishop Macarios in Minya has also meant a trade-off in institutional religious freedoms. Bishop Macarios was able to have violations against Copts recognized and in some instanced redressed at the level of individuals and communities in Minya, but in return, the vertical dimension of institutional freedom for the church as a religious organization has been compromised. This sets a dangerous precedent.

Pope Tawadrous has come under fire for not speaking out in cases of violations experienced by Copts, however, he would not need to, if Coptic civil society movements were able to assume the role of speaking on behalf of Copts whose rights are violated and

hold the government to account for its policies. This would allow for a division of roles that is politically justified- the Pope can maintain a political rapport with the President, while allowing Copts to mediate their demands through non-ecclesiastical pathways. Yet the church leadership's low threshold for the presence of alternative voices from within Coptic civil society to advocate and hold to account has hurt the Copts. While the church leadership has benefited from the absence of Coptic civil society holding it to account for its own policies, the trade-off is a loss not only for institutional religious freedom but also for contribution to public good. Currently, lay members participation in church affairs provides the church with a strong constituency, economic resources and a deeply relevant role in the spiritual and social realms. However, the denial of a space for Coptic lay persons to press the church for greater transparency on decision-making and greater accountability for its decision-making may in the long run hurt the institutional freedoms enjoyed by the church. For example, failure to address any internal incidence of abuse of power, if not handled internally through appropriate means, may spill over into the public domain, causing loss of public face.

There are no optimum "rules of the game" for securing religious equality, every option has its tradeoffs between different religious freedoms, some are more impactful at the level of the Coptic laity, others at the level of the church leadership, with some having greater implications for public good than others. The challenge in the upcoming phase will be how to protect the alliance between the Pope and President while creating the space for a pluralization of Coptic voices who can speak on behalf of the Copts. The institutionalization of religious freedom in such a scenario will also incur painful tradeoffs, but it also wields potential for contributing to public good from the point of view of supporting a robust civil society and promoting transparent governance.

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Notes

1 This formulation of the public good is a key feature of RFI's Freedom of Religious Institutions in Society (FORIS) Project and is found on the FORIS webpage: https://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/foris-project (accessed on 20 July 2021).

2 As the focus here is on domestic actors operating within a particular political context, the paper does not cover the agency of Coptic rights-demanding organizations in the Diaspora and that of transnational Coptic broadcasting stations, as important as they are in claims-making on behalf of Copts, they are beyond the remit of this paper so are best addressed in a separate inquiry.

3 For description and analysis of Coptic youth movements between 2013 and 2013 see for example (Delgado 2015; Du Roy 2016; Tadros 2013a, 2016a).

4 Ramy Kamel was finally released from prison in January 2022.

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