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A THEBAN LEGION ON THE BANKS OF THE POTOMAC:  
COPTIC POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE DIASPORA, THE U.S., AND THE EGYPTIAN POLITY

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## **Introduction**

In December 2005, U.S. Copts Association Chairman Michael Meunier stunned observers by making an unannounced trip to Egypt and to meet with some of the country's top officials.<sup>1</sup> Meunier's Association was—and remains—part of a burgeoning Coptic political movement in the diaspora that has for the last thirty years vociferously called on the Egyptian government to redress the grievances of its beleaguered Christian population. Several political commentators and Coptic activists abroad interpreted Meunier's visit as the Egyptian government's attempt to infiltrate the Coptic movement in the diaspora and co-opt one of its most active and recognizable personalities. Whether the meeting was an instance of co-option or a sincere attempt on the part of the Egyptian government to start a dialogue with certain Coptic diasporan leaders, the event and the coverage it garnered from state-owned and independent media outlets serves to demonstrate the Coptic diaspora's increasing sway on the Egyptian political scene.

This short paper seeks to assess and evaluate how Coptic political activism in the diaspora—specifically in the United States—influences Egyptian politics and society. I contend that the Coptic political movement in the diaspora constitutes a relatively unsophisticated movement that has managed to achieve limited, but not negligible, successes in the homeland, most important of which is the diaspora's ability to influence public discourse and debate on Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. In making this argument, I will first explore the history of early Coptic political activism abroad and how current diasporan organizations have come to globalize the socio-political grievances of Coptic Christians in Egypt. I will also discuss the structural and internal shortcomings that characterize the Coptic political leadership abroad and

other limitations that impede the movement from achieving maximum results. I will conclude by expounding on the diaspora's more noteworthy achievements.

## **A Theoretical Framework**

In order to properly assess and evaluate the case of Coptic political activism in hostland societies and its influence on homeland politics, it is important to briefly discuss this study within the broader framework of diaspora theory. To begin with, it is important to define what constitutes a "diaspora." In *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, Gabriel Sheffer posits that:

*an ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. Based on aggregate decisions to settle permanently in host countries, but to maintain a common identity, diasporans identify as such, showing solidarity with their group and the entire nation, and they organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. Among their various activities, members of such diasporas establish trans-state networks that reflect complex relationships among the diasporas, their host countries, their homelands, and international actors.<sup>2</sup>*

Sheffer argues that the continuity of a diaspora hinges on its' "members' wishes to maintain their ethno-national identities and contacts with their homelands and with other dispersed communities of the same origin."<sup>3</sup> He suggests two primary reasons for diaspora members' willingness to invest substantial resources in creating organizations aimed at nurturing relationships with host societies and governments, homelands, and kin in other host societies: "first, to promote the well-being and ensure the continuity of their communities in their host countries; second, to increase their ability to extend support to beleaguered homelands and other diaspora communities of the same national origin."<sup>4</sup>

In the editorial preface to the first issue of *Diaspora*, Khachig Tölölyan describes diasporas as the "exemplary communities of the transnational moment."<sup>5</sup> Lying at the nexus of domestic

and international politics, the transnational socio-political networks established by diasporas challenge the hegemony of modern nation-states and traditional state institutions. The Internet, satellite television, international telephone services, and the ease of international travel have made it easier for emigrants to engage in and influence the socio-political affairs and discourses of their ancestral homelands, rendering geographical and political boundaries far less significant than in the past. The combination of transnational migration, democratization, and communications technology has resulted in what Rey Koslowski argues is the “globalization of domestic politics.”<sup>6</sup> To quote Yossi Shain, diasporas “are therefore defined as the paradigmatic Other of the nation-state, as challengers of its traditional boundaries, as transnational transporters of cultures, and as manifestations of deterritorialized communities.”<sup>7</sup>

Democratic countries such as the United States, Canada and Western Europe provide emigrants with an environment conducive for political activism and organization. Migration and settlement in a democratic state often enables opposition to homeland socio-political conditions that otherwise might not be possible. In *Marketing the American Creed Abroad*, Shain argues that diasporas residing in the United States can serve as marketers of the American democratic-pluralist creed in their homelands.<sup>8</sup> In this capacity, diasporas are able to push American policymakers “to adhere to America’s neo-Wilsonian values of promoting democracy and openness around the globe, even when such policies seem to obstruct ad hoc strategic interests.”<sup>9</sup>

Shain’s argument is particularly useful explaining and qualifying Coptic political activism in the diaspora, specifically in the United States. Since the early seventies, Copts abroad have been lobbying host societies to press the Egyptian government for more religious freedom and rights for non-Muslim minorities. The principles of religious freedom and worship have

particular resonance in the United States, a nation founded on the shoulders of European emigrants escaping religious persecution.

### **Politicizing Coptic Identity in the Diaspora**

As Ph.D. candidate Grégoire Delhaye notes in “Les racines du dynamisme de la diaspora copte,” the Coptic church as a spiritual and social institution plays a central role in the development of Coptic identity in the diaspora.<sup>10</sup> It provides Christian emigrants from Egypt—be it in the United States or in France—with the space needed to produce and reproduce a uniquely Coptic-Egyptian identity in host societies distinct from their Egyptian Muslim émigré counterparts. As an example, Delhaye demonstrates how the Coptic Orthodox parish of St. Mark in Fairfax, Virginia serves not only as a religious institution, but also as a social venue that supports a primary school during the day, Arabic-language courses, a youth group, a gym, a reception hall, and a large kitchen for social events.<sup>11</sup> In “The Copts of Egypt,” Saad Eddin Ibrahim noted that Copts in the diaspora “tended to gather together in communities and the Coptic Orthodox Church built Orthodox churches in those communities.”<sup>12</sup> Currently, there are over 160 Coptic Orthodox churches in North America alone, with dozens more in Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Moreover, Coptic emigrants have established non-religious Coptic institutions in the diaspora, such as the Coptic Medical Society in the United Kingdom, Coptic primary and secondary schools in Australia, as well as philanthropic non-profit organizations such as the Virginia-based Coptic Orphans and New York-based Care 4 Needy Copts. All these institutions serve to foster and reinforce a distinctly Coptic Christian identity in the diaspora.

In this capacity, Coptic identity becomes more salient in the diaspora. In contrast to their

co-religionists in the homeland, Coptic emigrants no longer reside in an environment that compels them to foster social networks that include Muslim Egyptian personal and professional acquaintances. In *Minorities in the Middle East*, Nisan quotes U.S. Copts Association Chairman Michael Meunier: “We have every element of a nation. We have our own culture, history, and language...Our Coptic population exceeds by far the population of most Arab countries. We Copts share so little with Arabs and should not be identified with them.”<sup>13</sup> More recently, the Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese of North America recommended that all Americans of Coptic-Egyptian heritage write out “Coptic” as their “Race” in the March 2010 forms issued by the U.S. Department of Commerce Census Bureau.<sup>14</sup> This example serves to demonstrate that the clerical establishment in the diaspora seems now to have made it an official policy to cultivate a distinct Coptic identity outside the homeland, rather than a more inclusive Egyptian or Arab identity.

It is in this context that a Coptic political movement has emerged in the diaspora. After building the first Coptic churches in the diaspora in the sixties and seventies, the diasporic pioneers began to focus their efforts on secular issues, specifically the struggle for Coptic rights in Egypt.<sup>15</sup> As Fouad and Barbara Ibrahim note, Coptic political activists abroad have employed the following strategies in building and sustaining diasporic identity:<sup>16</sup>

- Through their websites and publications—including several newspapers and periodicals—they disseminate information on the most recent atrocities inflicted upon Copts in Egypt. Thus, they nurture the memory of past and present sufferings of Copts.
- They remind Copts in exile of the glorious past of Coptic Egypt, which contrasts so much with the troubled present.
- Making the local predicament of the native Copts globally known, they help endangered Copts in their home country to migrate, support immigrants seeking asylum to gain recognition, and give newcomers material and moral support.
- They establish and sustain networks among the Coptic diasporas worldwide.
- Knowing how much Egypt depends on U.S. financial aid, they exercise strong pressure on

their new home country through their lobby work.

In the second issue of “Political and Social Protest in Egypt,” Samer Soliman elaborates on the conditions that characterize Coptic political activism abroad.<sup>17</sup>

- Their encounter with societies in which modern values such as human rights and citizenship prevail—at least theoretically—have accentuated their recognition of the severity of the situation of their fellow Copts in Egypt.
- They are beyond the reach of the Egyptian state and Islamists and can in relative freedom.
- Their experience in liberal political systems has given them some skills of lobbying and organization.
- Their relationship with Christian groups and lobbies working for Christians worldwide have strengthened their positions.

### **The Emergence of a Coptic Diaspora**

In his seminal 1963 book *A Lonely Minority* detailing the conditions of Copts in Egypt, Edward Wakin noted that “the Copts have had little migration and no diaspora. It is both their burden and their fortune to have had only one home—the Nile Valley.”<sup>18</sup> Wakin went on to articulate that “in their historical refusal to emigrate, or even to enlist outside aid, the Copts have placed a geographic boundary—the banks of the Nile—on their critical test of Moslem-Christian relations.”<sup>19</sup> Copts—in contrast to their Armenian, Lebanese Christian, and Jewish minority counterparts—do not have a long tradition of emigration outside their homeland. Indeed, as economist Galal Amin notes, Egypt has historically been a country of immigration, not emigration, and the reluctance of the Egyptian—Muslim or Copt—to leave his or her homeland may be explained by the “vastness of the deserts that surround the Nile Valley; to emigrate would mean to leave that valley and go through barren and terrifying lands that no roads or train traverse.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite the absence of an extensive Coptic expatriate population, Wakin made note in the

early 1960s of the emergence of an incipient diaspora of “the young, educated and qualified who have begun to leave Egypt...talking not of greener pastures elsewhere but of closed doors at home...feeling deprived of the traditional Coptic right to market their skills at a reasonably high price, they turn to the last resort of departure and dispersion.”<sup>21</sup> Ghada Talhami explains that this early migration of primarily wealthy and Western-educated Copts was a response to political and economic measures carried out in the late fifties and sixties during Gamal Abdel Nasser’ tenure, which negatively affected the mercantile Coptic minority. While Nasser did not explicitly harass or subject Copts to persecution, his elimination of the multi-party system and his socialist measures in the 1960s deprived Copts “of a national role as influential members of certain secular parties, such as *Al-Wafd*...and cut a deep swath within the ranks of the Coptic bourgeoisie.”<sup>22</sup> Otherwise, Nasser in fact had an excellent relationship with the Coptic clerical establishment under Pope Kyrillos VI and his policy of suppressing Islamist groups generally worked to the benefit of the Coptic population.

The status quo changed dramatically during President Anwar al-Sadat’s tenure in the 1970s. The desire for more promising employment opportunities overseas, improved relations with the West, and the emergence of Islamic extremism propelled a massive movement of Copts outside their homeland. Countering Nasserine measures, permanent and temporary migration was authorized under Article 52 of the 1971 Constitution, which stated that ‘all Egyptians were granted the right to emigrate and to return home.’<sup>23</sup> According to official Egyptian statistics quoted by Ibrahim and Ibrahim, as much as 18 percent of Coptic Egyptians have emigrated from their homeland since the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> The Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) estimates that “Copts constituted 75 percent of all Egyptian permanent emigrants in the period 1990-1996...meaning that the rate of emigration among the Copts was

thirty times as high as that among their Muslim compatriots.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Early Coptic Diasporan Political Activism during the Sadat Era**

Sadat’s tenure marks some of the worst episodes of sectarian violence in modern Egyptian history. In a bid to counter Nasser’s politics and ideology of pan-Arabism, Sadat began to use Islam as an instrument of mobilization, presenting himself as a “Muslim President of a Muslim country.”<sup>26</sup> He released thousands of Islamists imprisoned during the Nasser years and affirmed Islam as Egypt’s state religion in 1971. Naturally, such policies served to alienate Copts and the clerical establishment openly confronted the regime’s Islamizing campaign. It is in this context that a Coptic political movement crystallized in the diaspora.

The early mobilization and organization of a Coptic political movement in the United States is the product of the efforts of the late Shawky Karas, a professor of mathematics at the Southern Connecticut State University. Born on 6 October 1928 in the Egyptian province of Sohag, Karas immigrated to the United States in the 1970s and founded the American Coptic Association (ACA) with the purpose of drawing attention to the plight of Christians in Egypt during Sadat’s tenure.<sup>27</sup> Diaspora accusations of the Egyptian government’s official and unofficial policy of suppressing Copts and turning a blind eye to Islamist-inspired attacks on Christians appeared first in 1972 and later in the pages of the *Manchester Guardian* and the *New York Times*.<sup>28</sup> The ACA was responsible for organizing a number of protests outside the White House during Sadat’s official meetings with President Jimmy Carter, and later, President Ronald Reagan. The ACA also organized a demonstration in front of the Metropolitan Museum where Sadat was inaugurating a new section of Egyptian artifacts.<sup>29</sup>

Sadat was deeply embarrassed by these Coptic-led demonstrations in the United States and “publicly registered his displeasure with the hierarchy of the Coptic Church, and especially its

leader, Pope Shenouda.”<sup>30</sup> While Sadat was attempting to cultivate a positive image of the Egyptian government in the West, especially the United States, Copts abroad humiliated him in “in front of his friend ‘Jimmy’ by distributing pamphlets outside the White House and the United Nations describing in highly charged language how their churches were being bombed, their priests were being assassinated and blinded, their sons were being beaten in the universities, their daughters were being raped and abducted, their homes were being ransacked, and their stores torched and looted.”<sup>31</sup> Jehan Sadat, Anwar’s wife, elaborates on her husband’s reaction to such political activity in the diaspora after their August 1981 trip to the White House: “...*the Copts punished us.. I could not believe my eyes when, on the second day of our U.S. visit, I opened the Washington Post...the list of complaints, signed at the bottom by the Coptic Associations of America and Canada, seemed to go on forever...if the Copts had wanted to win sympathy with their exaggerations, they had succeeded only in making Anwar angrier...*”<sup>32</sup>

Sadat suspected Pope Shenouda of orchestrating, from Egypt, these Coptic-organized demonstrations that customarily greeted his visits to the United States.<sup>33</sup> In speeches delivered to the *Maglis al-Shaab*, or People’s Assembly, in both 1980 and 1981, Sadat accused the Coptic clerical establishment of sedition and using Copts in the United States to slander the image of Egypt and the Egyptian government. In a speech delivered on 14 May 1980, Sadat articulated, “*Sedition continued from 1972 and was still going on when I left for Camp David in 1978. The new leaders of the church as I said, were going ahead with sedition...the expatriate Copts therefore, demonstrated in front of the United Nations and the White House because the Copts in Egypt do not enjoy human rights. Not only that: Telegrams were also dispatched to President Carter. Why? Why should we do such a thing in Egypt? [sic]. To what purpose and in whose interest?...Leaflets were to be circulated outside Blair house. A demonstration was to be staged*

*in the street outside the guest house in which I would be staying. A demonstration was to be staged outside the U.N. building. And this is exactly what happened. Half a page was to be reserved in the Washington Post. This also happened.*”<sup>34</sup> The relationship between the President and Pope completely degenerated by 1981, and on 3 September of that year, Sadat signed a decree banishing Shenouda, ordering him into exile at the Monastery of St. Pishoy in the Nitrian Desert.

In the wake of Shenouda’s exile, the ACA stepped up its lobbying efforts to liberate their spiritual leader. Coptic associations in Australia, Canada, and the United States of America carried out an extensive campaign to free Pope Shenouda using paid advertisements in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *London Times*, and other newspapers and arranged demonstrations in Canberra, Australia; Montreal, Canada; London, England; Washington, DC; and New York City, U.S.A.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, the ACA sought the support of members of Congress who were instrumental in pressuring the Egyptian government to release Shenouda, specifically in the wake of Sadat’s assassination on 6 October 1981. A number of congressmen, senators, and human rights activists pressed Sadat’s successor and current president, Hosni Mubarak, on the issue. In a letter addressed to Mubarak on 5 February 1983, Congressman Nicholas Mavroules wrote to request the release of Shenouda, stating that he “should be free to resume his administrative and ecclesiastical duties.”<sup>36</sup> Thanks to the efforts of Rafik R. Attia, President of the American Coptic Association’s Boston chapter, Senator Paul E. Tsongas and Congressman James M. Shannon both wrote directly to Mubarak—in June and July of 1983—pleading for Shenouda’s release.<sup>37</sup> On 18 August 1982, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and

International Organizations Don Bonker appealed to Mubarak to “release from house arrest Pope Shenouda and to allow the bishops and the other members of the Coptic Christian community in Egypt to practice their religion.”<sup>38</sup> In a letter addressed to Secretary of State George P. Schultz on 1 February 1984 on the eve of his trip to Egypt, 36 members of Congress requested that Shultz “express our concern to President Mubarak of Egypt over the situation of Coptic Christians...and urge him to take the necessary initiatives to end the religious strife and the confinement of Pope Shenouda III, the patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church.”<sup>39</sup>

As a result of external and internal pressures, the Egyptian government released Pope Shenouda on 1 January 1985. On 6 January 1985, Shenouda celebrated the Christmas liturgy in the Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo. For some time, the Mubarak regime was able to restore calm and Muslim-Christian cooperation resumed—the Coptic political movement in the diaspora toned down its activities considerably. It would not be until the early 1990s, when Islamic militancy resurfaced, that Copts abroad would resume their political efforts.

### **Coptic Political Activism in the Diaspora: Limitations and Shortcomings**

At present, Coptic political activism in the diaspora can be characterized as constituting a relatively unsophisticated, albeit maturing, movement that suffers from internal divisions and structural shortcomings that impede the leadership from achieving maximum results. The nature of the strategic relationship between the United State and Egypt also limits the successes of the Coptic lobby. Before tracking Coptic diasporan political activity since the early 1990s, it is important to expound on these limitations and shortcomings that have served to obstruct the movement’s ability to influence homeland politics and society.

By and large, it is the fragmented and divisive nature that characterizes the Coptic political leadership in the diaspora that impedes progress and weakens the movement. Ninette Fahmy

made clear in an interview conducted for this research endeavor that Coptic leaders in the diaspora suffer from competing egos and superiority complexes, each trying to present himself as the “leader of the Copts abroad.”<sup>40</sup> This egoism on the part of the Coptic diasporan leadership has resulted in a multitude of organizations that do not necessarily work in unison. Fahmy described the dictatorial-like attitudes of many of the leaders, the lack of cohesion and approach to the cause, and the lack of democracy within the movement.<sup>41</sup> Youssef Sidhom, Editor-in-Chief of the Coptic weekly *Watani* newspaper, similarly conveyed dismay at witnessing inflated egos and competing personalities when he was a participant at the first international Coptic conference held in 2004 in Zurich, Switzerland.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the explicitly anti-Islamic rhetoric of some personalities—such as Morris Sadek—have served to alienate the more moderate elements in the diaspora, not to mention public opinion in the homeland where such provocative rhetoric can have dire consequences on homeland Copts.<sup>43</sup>

One of the more prominent rifts within the diasporan Coptic political leadership is that which emerged between U.S. Copts Association Chairman Michael Meunier and Coptic activist and journalist Magdi Khalil, Founder and Director of the Middle East Freedom Forum. While the relationship between the two was never entirely smooth, it completely degenerated in December 2005 when Meunier made an unannounced trip to Egypt and met with prominent Egyptian officials, including Director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Services Lt. Gen. Omar Suleiman. Meunier’s visit to Egypt received a full publicity campaign by state-owned and independent news media outlets. As far as Khalil was concerned, the Egyptian government had co-opted a self-interested Meunier, and the state was trying to infiltrate the Coptic political movement in the diaspora.<sup>44</sup> Several other Coptic activists abroad have adopted Khalil’s view, suggesting that Meunier has sacrificed the Coptic movement abroad for egocentric purposes and

is engaging a government that has become adept at delivering empty promises. Meunier, however, suggested that as the most politically astute and active Coptic leader in the diaspora, it was his conviction that pressuring the Egyptian government through a third party—the United States—had reached its zenith and that any progress to redress Coptic grievances required opening channels of communication with the Egyptian government.<sup>45</sup>

At the International Coptic Conference in Chicago—held the weekend of 20 October 2007 and sponsored by the Coptic Assembly of America—William Weesa, a Coptic intellectual and journalist residing in France, delivered a lecture titled “The Coptic Movement: Present and Future,”<sup>46</sup> expounding on the history of Coptic political activism in the diaspora and its current conditions, elaborating on the movement’s shortcomings and weaknesses. Weesa noted that the movement’s “work is spread thinly” throughout the diaspora and that there was an “absence of an organized political system to which all diaspora Coptic associations are affiliated.” He articulated that “the movement is based on the disconcerted efforts of scattered micro-group” with “no coordination” and that all “these groups are spread all over the world and are mostly—with rare exceptions—of a very small number of members.” He expressed that there was a “lack of a political and ideological compact for the movement shared by all affiliated associations to determine their goals, plan of action and to serve as a common ground for all.” Weesa argued that one of the gravest deficiencies suffered by Coptic political activism in the diaspora is the “absence of an efficient and professional taskforce,” noting that “all statements issued in English and other foreign languages are overlooked by Western media because of the poor and unprofessional style, while inside Egypt they are overlooked by local press for reasons related to the absence of freedom of expression.”

Moreover, Weesa noted that there are no effective Coptic movements inside Egypt, arguing it “imperative that the Coptic movement develop a base” in the homeland. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to speak of an organized Coptic movement inside Egypt. Nor are there clear indicators of any emerging, homegrown Coptic movement. As Fahmy bluntly explained, “the Copts have developed a trait of cowardice.”<sup>47</sup> Hassan notes, “the Copts have accepted molestation at the hands of Muslims with a resignation that borders on fatalism. Thirteen centuries of oppression have developed in them the traits of prudence and fearfulness.”<sup>48</sup>

In fact, the Coptic clerical establishment in Egypt under Shenouda has continuously and officially denounced all forms of Coptic political opposition emanating from the diaspora. He rejects U.S. interference in Egyptian internal affairs and “insists on a national discussion and solution to any Coptic problem.”<sup>49</sup> In Chapter 3 of Rajab al-Banna’s *Al-Aqbat fi Misr wu al-Mahjar: Hiwarat ma’a al-Baba Shanudah* [The Copts in Egypt and the Diaspora: Interviews with Pope Shenouda], the Patriarch expounds on his total rejection of Coptic political activism in the diaspora.<sup>50</sup> Since his release from exile in 1985, Shenouda has renounced his confrontational style with the regime and sought “not simply to accommodate the government, but cultivate a close relationship with President Mubarak.”<sup>51</sup> In the run-up to President Hosni Mubarak’s August 2009 visit to Washington—his first in several years—Shenouda made an earlier trip to the States to—among other spiritual obligations to his overseas flock—discourage Coptic organizations from demonstrating outside the White House upon the Egyptian president’s arrival.<sup>52</sup> He later sent his personal secretary, Bishop Yoannes, and an official Coptic Church delegation to Washington to welcome President Mubarak on his arrival conveying an image of national unity and Church-State cooperation.<sup>53</sup>

The Coptic lobby in the United States is further complicated by the strategic US-Egypt

relationship. Albeit founded on the principles and tenants of freedom of religion and speech, the United States “will not jeopardize its relationship with a key, stable ally in the region for the sake of liberating the Copts.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Egypt is a vital U.S. ally in the Middle East and the Coptic lobby is not strong enough to compel U.S. policy in any particular direction. As Shehata notes, “American warships frequently pass through the Suez Canal and U.S. military aircraft are routinely granted permission to fly over Egyptian territory. The Egyptian government maintains the terms of the Camp David peace treaty with Israel and as a consequence receives billions of dollars annually in U.S. economic and military assistance. Cairo plays a mediating role in the Palestinian-Israeli ‘peace-process’ ...and Egypt’s security and intelligence agencies have cooperated in the Bush administration’s war on terror.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the Egyptian government has spent quite a bit of its own financial resources in creating a counter-lobby to Coptic activism in Washington.

For all these reasons, the Coptic lobby in the diaspora can be described as relatively unsophisticated, especially if compared with the conditions that characterize the Jewish and Armenian lobbies in the United States. Both the Jewish and Armenian diasporas are politically and materially strong, extremely well-organized, and very successful in lobbying American policymakers to support their respective homelands.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, a 20<sup>th</sup>-century genocide in both cases has served to foster a sense of communal solidarity and deep commitment to the homeland. While Coptic grievances are typically justifiable and legitimate, the situation in Egypt has not been so explosive as to mobilize the majority of Copts in the diaspora into political action. Youssef Sidhom remarked that most Copts abroad are part of the “silent majority,” while only a handful of Copts have become active in diaspora political activism.<sup>57</sup> Not even the recent January 2010 attacks in Nag Hammadi or the El-Kosheh incident in January 2000 have propelled

the mass mobilization of Copts abroad.

### Present-day Diasporan Coptic Political Organizations

There exists a plethora of registered and unregistered Coptic political organizations in the diaspora, all of which aim to improve the conditions of Christians in Egypt, though they may espouse different ideological or strategic approaches to achieving this end. The following table lists a sample of the Coptic political organizations in the diaspora.

Name of Organization	Year Founded	Headquarters	Website
American Coptic Association	1974	Jersey City, New Jersey	www.amcoptic.com
American Coptic Union	1992	Jersey City, New Jersey	www.copts4freedom.com
Association des Coptes de France	1992	Paris, France	www.franco-copte.com
Canadian Coptic Association	1969	Montreal, Canada	www.copticnews.ca
Coptic Assembly of America	2006	Chicago, Illinois	www.copticassembly.org
European Union of Coptic Organizations for Human Rights	2008	Geneva, Switzerland	www.eucohr.com
U.K. Copts Association	1999	London, United Kingdom	www.copts.co.uk
U.S. Copts Association	1996	Falls Church, Virginia	www.copts.com

The following is a list of the more prolific organizations and associations that have come to play a prominent role in Coptic political activity in the diaspora.

- ***U.S. Copts Association.*** The U.S. Copts Association is a Virginia-based non-profit organization founded by engineer Michael Meunier in 1996. The association is “dedicated to raising awareness regarding the plight of the Copts within Egypt and educating the Coptic community both in Egypt and abroad on issues of human rights, democracy, and religious freedom.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, while the association is “committed to

preserving and promoting Egypt's unity, prosperity, and peace,"<sup>59</sup> it is also "dedicated to reversing the unacceptable state of affairs imposed upon the Copts within their own homeland."<sup>60</sup> It is one of the most active Coptic political organizations in the diaspora.

- ***The Coptic Assembly of America.*** The Coptic Assembly of America (CAA) is a Chicago-based organization founded in 2006 by real-estate investor Cameel Halim that is "dedicated to promoting equality, unity, human rights and democracy in Egypt for all citizens and to protecting the unique cultural identify of Egypt's Coptic Christians."<sup>61</sup> According to the organization's website, the CAA is focused on three central activities: building capacity in the Coptic diaspora; creating and managing coalitions of interested organizations; and meeting with decision makers in Washington, D.C. and at the United Nations.<sup>62</sup>
- ***Canadian Coptic Association.*** The Montreal-based Canadian Coptic Association was founded by retired judge and attorney Selim Naguib on 2 February 1969, making it the "first organized political group of Copts in the diaspora."<sup>63</sup> Officially incorporated by the Canadian Federal Government on 29 October 1992, the Canadian Coptic Association's stated goal is "for the persecuted Coptic minority to obtain their full religious, political and social rights."
- ***The Canadian Egyptian Organization for Human Rights.*** The Canadian Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (CEOHR) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization incorporated on 4 June 1996 under Part II of the Canada Corporation Act. Although not an exclusively Coptic institution, the CEOHR has dedicated itself primarily to the cause of religious minorities in Egypt. The Board of Directors, including the President Nabil A. Malek, is largely of Coptic persuasion. The CEOHR's primary objective is "to

promote and work for the protection and observance of human and minority rights as stipulated in the United Nations instruments.”<sup>64</sup>

- ***Copts United.*** Copts United is a Zurich-based association founded in 2004 by the late engineer Adly Abadir Youssef, the “spiritual father” of the Coptic cause. Mr. Abadir Youssef was a dual Swiss-Egyptian national and multi-millionaire responsible for organizing and sponsoring the first in a series of international conferences addressing Coptic grievances in Egypt. The mission of Copts United is to “serve the Coptic cause in particular and the rights of the Egyptian population in general.” Youssef’s daughter, Magda Streuli Youssef—a lawyer and partner at the Zurich law firm Walder Wyss & Partners—is the Chairman of the Swiss-based Coptic Foundation for Human Rights.<sup>65</sup>
- ***The U.K. Copts Association.*** Formerly known as the U.K. Coptic Association, the U.K. Copts Association was founded on 8 December 2000 by physician Helmy Guirguis. The association’s “main objective is to work towards promoting and securing religious freedom and human rights for Christians in Egypt...through peaceful and legitimate means.”<sup>66</sup>

Most Coptic organizations in the diaspora have expressed a core set of demands from the Egyptian government. While some organizations have more detailed demands and goals than others, the following list illustrates some of the goals desired by the vast majority of Coptic institutions abroad.

- The immediate abolishment of the antiquated 19<sup>th</sup>-century *Hamayouni* decree—regulating the construction and renovation of Christian edifices by government-decree—as well as the ten restrictive conditions enforced by the government since February 1934.
- The removal of the second Article in the Egyptian Constitution stipulating “That Islam is the National Religion and “Islamic Sharia is the main source of legislation.”
- Educational curriculums must be revised to guarantee that they do not contain any

denigrating references to Christians and Christianity.

- An end to discrimination against Christians in government job appointments and promotions, especially at the level of top ranks in every ministry.
- An end to discrimination in government-controlled school admission against Christian students.
- An end to forced conversion of Christian girls, who are kidnapped and raped by Muslim extremists. There are reports of police protection given to the abductors.

### **The Coptic Lobby in the US and Transnational Activism**

The big break for Coptic political organizations in the diaspora to influence homeland politics came in the late nineties during Congressional talks to pass a freedom from religious persecution law mandating the promotion of religious freedom as a central pillar of U.S. foreign policy. Introduced by Republican Congressman Frank Wolf and Democratic Senator Arlen Specter, the International Religious Freedom Act passed unanimously by both houses of Congress and was signed by President Bill Clinton on 27 October 1998. Coptic political organizations in the diaspora—specifically the U.S. Copts Association—coalesced with other transnational religious organizations—such as Christian Solidarity International and the Center for Religious Freedom—to lobby Congress to legislate the Act. In letters published in the *Washington Times* on 12 April 1998, Meunier and Keith Roderick, Secretary General of the Coalition for the Defense of Human Rights, expounded on Coptic grievances and made impassioned defenses of the movement for a religious persecution bill.<sup>67</sup> Several prominent Muslim and Coptic personalities in Egypt slammed the Act and discussions leading up to its legislation, accusing it of providing the U.S. government the *carte blanche* to interfere in domestic Egyptian affairs.<sup>68</sup>

The International Religious Freedom Act resulted in the creation of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to “monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments.”<sup>69</sup> Since 2002, Egypt has been on the USCIRF “Watch List” as a country with serious religious freedom violations, including widespread problems of discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations against members of religious minorities, as well as disfavored Muslims. USCIRF’s annual follow-up visits by an “American-fact-finding mission committee that reports to Congress every year is a source of major annoyance to the Egyptian state.”<sup>70</sup>

The USCIRF’s annual reports have consistently highlighted official and unofficial forms of discrimination aimed at religious minorities in Egypt, specifically Copts and Baha’is. In its May 2009 report, USCIRF noted that “violent attacks on Christian communities have resulted in very few prosecutions,”<sup>71</sup> that the “Coptic Orthodox Christian community faces *de facto* discrimination in appointments to high-level government and military posts,”<sup>72</sup> and that “government permission is required to build a new church or repair an existing one.”<sup>73</sup> The report recommended that the U.S. government establish a timetable for the Mubarak regime to address these and other human rights violations, stating that “if deadlines are not met, the U.S. government should reconsider the appropriate allocation of its assistance to the Egyptian government.”<sup>74</sup>

Members of the USCIRF committee—who have an ongoing rapport with Coptic diasporan leaders such as Meunier—have raised Coptic grievances to the highest levels of U.S. political authority. In a letter addressed on 24 March 2000, USCIRF Chair Rabbi David Saperstein urged President Bill Clinton to address discriminatory practices against the Copts with Egyptian

President Husni Mubarak, on the eve of an official visit to the United States.<sup>75</sup> The letter was in response to a sectarian outburst that erupted in the Upper Egyptian village of Al-Kosheh in January 2000, leaving 21 Copts and 1 Muslim dead. In a letter addressed on 28 March 2001, USCIRF Chairman Elliott Abrams, Vice Chairman Firuz Kazemzadeh, and Commissioner Layla Al-Marayati similarly urged President George W. Bush to raise the issue of religious freedom in his meeting with President Mubarak.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, on 16 November 2005, USCIRF Commissioner Elizabeth H. Prodromou testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus (CHRC) at a briefing titled “Religious Freedom and Democracy in Egypt: The Role of Coptic Christians and Muslims.” In her testimony, Prodromou highlighted three of the more serious issues that the Commission felt deserved attention: societal violence against and lack of protection for Coptic Christians; persistent anti-Semitism in the media and education system; and requirements on national ID cards that discriminate against Baha’is and others.<sup>77</sup>

While Coptic activists have cultivated a relationship with a number of politicians on Capitol Hill, Congressman Frank Wolf remains one of their most ardent and reliable spokesmen. He has repeatedly called for the Egyptian regime to respect human rights, including those of religious minorities, bloggers, journalists, and political dissidents. In a letter addressed to President Mubarak on 1 October 2008, Wolf and eight other congressmen requested the immediate pardon of the imprisoned Ayman Abdel-Aziz Nour, former opposition presidential candidate, for “compassionate and humanitarian reasons.”<sup>78</sup> On 2 January 2009, Wolf sent separate letters to Margaret Scobey, U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, and Sameh Shoukry, Egyptian Ambassador to the United States, criticizing the Egyptian authorities’ refusal to enforce a court ruling granting a Coptic woman, Mervat Reszqallah, custody of her daughter on the grounds that the child’s father, Fady Farhaat Labbib, had converted to Islam. He wrote that he found “the

Egyptian security authorities' brazen disregard for the rule of law and systematic discrimination against the Christian community in Egypt to be appalling.”<sup>79</sup> Wolf went on to write that “the ability of an independent judiciary to uphold and enforce the rule of law is critical to fostering democratic values in Egypt.”<sup>80</sup>

Prior to President Barack Obama's historic speech to the Muslim world in Cairo on 4 June 2009, ten congressmen—Frank Wolf, John Shadegg, Sae Myrick, Ted Poe, Zach Wamp, Trent Franks, Dan Burton, Paul Brown, Patrick McHenry, and Joe Pitts—urged the U.S. President in a letter dated 28 May 2009 to press “Middle Eastern governments to relentlessly lend their support to the marginalized, weak, and oppressed segments of their societies by recognizing the universal importance of basic human dignity.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the letter urged Obama “to ask them [Muslim viewers] to help Egypt fight the scourge of terrorism and stand by its own Coptic minority, often targeted by extremists' violence.”<sup>82</sup> The appeal did not fall on deaf ears. When he delivered “On a New Beginning” in Cairo, President Obama articulated: “*Among some Muslims, there's a disturbing tendency to measure one's own faith by the rejection of somebody else's faith. The richness of religious diversity must be upheld—whether it is for Maronites in Lebanon or the Copts in Egypt.*”

Moreover, on 26 February 2009 Congressman Wolf introduced House Resolution 200 to Congress, calling on the Egyptian government to respect human rights and freedoms of religion. The resolution emphasizes the ailing conditions of the Copts, stating that Egypt's largest religious minority group suffers from many forms of discrimination, including—<sup>83</sup>

- a lack of employment in higher positions of the public sector, universities, army, and the security service;
- disproportional representation in Parliament and the Shura Council;
- difficulty in building and repairing churches;

- lack of protection and lack of prosecution of perpetrators in cases of sectarian violence;
- government harassment of converts to Christianity while the government encourages conversion to Islam; and
- the inability to obtain government issued identification cards which reflect conversion to Christianity.

Certain Coptic organizations have exerted considerable effort to lobby the passage of the resolution. On 7 May 2009, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held a hearing titled “Human Rights in Egypt.”<sup>84</sup> James McGovern, co-chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, chaired the hearing, attended by a number of Egyptian human rights activists including Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Founding Chair of the Ibn Khaldun Center, Ahmed Salah, an activist and leader of the 6 April movement in Egypt, and Cameel Halim, Chairman of the Coptic Assembly of America. All participants lauded and encouraged the passage of House Resolution 200. Halim specifically discussed the pervasive discrimination faced by religious minorities in Egypt, emphasizing that “a government which intentionally works against religious freedom is one that promotes radicalism and intolerance; and this ultimately undermines peace and security throughout the region and the world.”<sup>85</sup> He expressed “support for placing conditions of reform on the U.S. military aid, but not the economic aid, which he requested be restored to previous, higher levels.”<sup>86</sup>

Meunier has been particularly active in cultivating relationships with and lobbying influential personalities on Capitol Hill. As Brainard and Brinkerhoff note, he “occasionally testifies before Congress and has been asked to hold joint press conferences with members of Congress,”<sup>87</sup> including Frank Wolf and Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas. Moreover, Meunier was part “of the strategy sessions with President Bush regarding the case of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, head of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, who had been imprisoned in Egypt

allegedly on corruption charges...In this session, Meunier strongly advocated for the \$150 million cut in U.S. foreign aid to Egypt that was offered as an incentive to release Ibrahim.”<sup>88</sup>

Although a more recent addition to the Coptic diasporan leadership, Chairman of the Coptic Assembly of America Cameel Halim has also pressed the issue of Coptic rights in Washington.

For example, on 7 May 2009, he delivered a testimony of the conditions of Copts at the Congressional Human Rights Caucus.<sup>89</sup>

Coptic organizations in the diaspora have also worked very closely with transnational Christian religious organizations. More recently, Christian Solidarity International (CSI) has worked to highlight Coptic grievances in conjunction with the Zurich-based Coptic Foundation for Human Rights (CFHR). In November 2009, the two organizations commissioned a report titled *The Disappearance, Forced Conversions, and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women in Egypt*, reporting 25 cases of abduction and conversion.<sup>90</sup> Michele Clark, an anti-trafficking specialist, and Nadia Ghaly, a women’s rights activist, conducted research in Egypt and authored the report, documenting what the CSI called a “criminal pattern involving deception, sexual violence, captivity, compulsion to convert to Islam and forced marriage.” John Eibner, CEO of CSI, addressed a letter to President Barack Obama on 10 November 2009 making him aware of the publication’s release and evidence of trafficking of non-Muslim women and girls in Egypt.<sup>91</sup> As Rowe notes, “the growth of transnational religious movements serves to present new challenges to governments in dealing with an externalized opposition legitimizing their antagonism in new ways and through new channels.”

Since 2004, Coptic organizations in the diaspora have sponsored international conferences to highlight and address Coptic grievances and other human rights issues in Egypt. These

conferences have been well-publicized—and in several instances condemned—by the Egyptian press. It was the Swiss-based Copts United organization headed by the wealthy engineer Adly Abadir that first conceived of such a conference in Zurich in September 2004. Participants in the three-day event, titled *The First International Symposium on Egyptian Copts: A Minority under Siege*, included leading Coptic activists in the diaspora such as Michael Meunier, Magdi Khalil, Fouad Ibrahim, and Selim Naguib, as well as other prominent—and controversial—personalities such as Paul Marshall, Nir Boms, Daniel Pipes, and Keith Roderick. The Jubilee Campaign, CSI, and Freedom House co-sponsored the event. The conference culminated with eight “Resolutions” that were relayed to the Egyptian government—<sup>92</sup>

- Instituting a total separation of religion and state through constitutional reforms, and the removal of emphasis on religion and its role in government institutions, emphasizing the secular nature of the State.
- Denouncing the *Hamayouni* Decree as unconstitutional in order to establish the equal rights of all Egyptians to build and maintain places of worship.
- Allocating a proportionate and just percentage (estimated between 10-15%) of government appointed positions to Copts, to guarantee appropriate participation.
- Allocating a proportionate and just percentage (estimated between 10-15%) of parliamentary seats for Copts, thereby encouraging political participation and guaranteeing adequate representation in the Electoral Bodies.
- Removing religious identification from every government issued document, form, or application.
- Enforcing the constitution in order to guarantee the freedom and protection of religious beliefs of all Egyptians, free from all coercion.
- Ending the practice of treating all Coptic issues, including their struggle to attain equal rights, as ‘State Security Matters’ and removing what is known as the ‘Coptic File’ from the grip of the State Security Intelligence Apparatus, with the aim of restoring equality between all Egyptians under rule of law.
- Reforming school curriculum and the media to remove all demeaning references to non-Muslims, and introducing an educational curriculum teaching tolerance, acceptance of others, respect for human rights, and religious freedom.

Since the 2004 conference in Zurich, similar international Coptic conferences have been held in Washington, D.C., Montreal, New Jersey, and Chicago.

### **Influencing Politics and Public Debate in the Homeland**

The Coptic political movement in the diaspora remains relatively unsophisticated and of limited influence; however, the Egyptian government has over the last decade addressed a number of Coptic grievances, arguably a product of pressures exerted by Coptic political activists in the diaspora. As noted by Mona Makram Ebeid, the Egyptian government is “very sensitive about its image in the West,”<sup>93</sup> particularly the United States. In this capacity, the government has resorted to a series of “tradeoffs, a response to both local and international pressure.”<sup>94</sup> In *La question copte: Études sur la situation des chrétiens d’Égypte*<sup>95</sup>, Adrien Margueritte details some of the Egyptian government’s most recent attempts to assuage Coptic demands inside and outside Egypt.

- In December 2002, Hosni Mubarak declared 7 January—Coptic Orthodox Christmas—a national holiday. Since then, Coptic religious celebrations such as Christmas and Easter have been broadcast on state-owned television.
- In January 2006, Mubarak named a Copt as governor of the southern Egyptian governorate of Qena, one of 26 provinces throughout the country, for the first time in 30 years.
- The *Hamayouni* Decree, restricting the construction and renovations of churches unless approved by presidential decree, was amended in 1999 so as to place the decision in the hands of province governors rather than the president.
- Approximately 900 Church-owned *feddans*, or acres, confiscated by the Nasser regime have been returned to the rightful proprietors.

The diaspora Coptic movement’s most visible achievement, however, has been its ability to influence public discourse and debate in Egypt on Muslim-Christian relations and Coptic grievances more generally. As Mona Makram-Ebeid duly noted, Coptic activists abroad have “opened up Pandora’s box, garnering the attention of both the government and public.”<sup>96</sup>

Sidhom confirmed—despite his reservations with certain activists in the diaspora and the approach of the movement more generally—that “political activism in the diaspora is moving sedentary waters.”<sup>97</sup> While state-owned media in Egypt have typically and generally continue to espouse antagonistic attitudes toward Coptic activists abroad, recently established independent Arabic-language news media outlets such as *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and *Al-Youm Al-Sabe’a* have covered the subject far more objectively and provided an outlet for Coptic leaders abroad to disseminate their message to a larger Egyptian audience. In this capacity, Coptic activists in the diaspora have been able to shape and influence public opinion and attitudes in the homeland.

For example, in a 21 August 2009 article published by *Al-Youm Al-Sabe’a*, writer Amr Jad expounded on ten demands made by Copts in the diaspora on the eve of President Hosni Mubarak’s trip to Washington, D.C.<sup>98</sup> The author did not depict the Coptic activists as traitors or Zionists as does typically the state-owned press. In a 22 August 2008 *Al-Masry Al-Youm* op-ed titled “Copts of the Diaspora,”<sup>99</sup> Amr Hamzawy, an Egyptian political scientist and senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, remarked that Copts in the diaspora do not constitute a monolith, nor do they champion Coptic causes exclusively but national, human rights causes that benefit all Egyptians more generally. Moreover, he emphasized that while there were certainly extremist Coptic personalities in the diaspora, the majority of Copts abroad are Egyptian nationals and nationalists.

Private and independent news outlets have conducted several interviews with leading Coptic personalities and social commentators in the diaspora and introduced their message(s) to the Egyptian public for consumption. For example, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* journalists have conducted a number of fairly lengthy interviews with such Coptic activists as Michael Meunier,<sup>100</sup> William Weesa,<sup>101</sup> Kamal Ibrahim,<sup>102</sup> and Cameel Halim.<sup>103</sup> In the wake of

sectarian outbursts, these media outlets have been more readily willing to summon the insights and opinions of prominent Coptic activists abroad. In this capacity, the media introduces Egyptian audiences to a diverse Coptic political movement abroad that does not conform to the monolithic and extremist image often painted by the state-owned press.

Whether or not there is any truth to the claim that he has been co-opted by the regime, U.S. Copts Association Chairman Michael Meunier—more than any other Coptic activist in the diaspora—has achieved an unparalleled level of recognition in Egypt as a leading spokesperson for Coptic rights since he began engaging and negotiating with the Egyptian government in 2005. His television appearances have become quite frequent, especially in the wake of sectarian outbursts such as the recent Christmas Eve massacres on 6 January 2010 in Nagg Hammadi. On several occasions, Meunier has been a guest on Amr Adib's *Al-Qahira Al-Youm*, one of the most popular television talk show programs in the Middle East, where he has expressed his views regarding Coptic grievances, Islamic extremism, and Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. More recently, he appeared in an hour-long television interview on prominent Egyptian journalist Yousri Fouda's show *Akhir Kalam*.

More objective representations of Coptic political activism in the diaspora have even made their way into contemporary Egyptian literature. In Alaa al-Aswany's *Chiago*,<sup>104</sup> character Dr. Karam Doss is a decent and hard-working American-citizen of Coptic-Egyptian heritage who emigrates because of discriminatory employment practices in his natal land. In the United States, he achieves wealth, stature, and prestige as a successful medical professor and begins to champion the rights of Copts in Egypt from his adopted homeland. Through Dr. Karam Doss' character, Aswany paints a rather realistic portrayal of the thoughts, mindsets, and experiences of several Coptic political activists living in the diaspora.

## **Conclusion**

As this paper has sought to demonstrate, the Coptic political movement in the diaspora is relatively unsophisticated and limited in its ability to influence homeland politics in Egypt, particularly when compared to the Jewish and Armenian lobby. Internal divisions and competing egos within the diasporan leadership, the lack of ideological compact, the absence of a base in the homeland, inability to mobilize most members of the diaspora around the cause, and the strategic US-Egypt alliance have impeded the movement's ability to maximize its success rate.

However, the Egyptian government, concerned about its image in the West and the United State in particular, has been compelled to address overseas activism and international pressure by responding to a limited number of Coptic-articulated grievances. Moreover, and more importantly, the emergence of privately-owned media outlets has provided Coptic activists abroad with a medium to disseminate their message and influence public discourse and debate regarding Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt. In this capacity, the Coptic diaspora has come to play an important role shaping public opinion and attitudes regarding issues of minority rights, democracy, and freedom of religion in Egypt. The Coptic example serves to demonstrate Shain's argument that overseas migrants can serve as the marketers of American democratic ideals in their ancestral countries.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For Arabic-press coverage and diaspora reactions to the visit, see Elhami al-Maliji and Hamadi Salim, “Awil Ziyara li-Mudir Munthamat Aqbat al-Mahgar Ila Ila Misr,” *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 9 December 2005. Retrieved from the following URL: <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=337394&issueno=9873>; and Munir al-Mawari and Abdu Zeina, “32 Qiyadat Qibtiyan bi-Amrika Yintaqidun bi-Shada Ziyarat Ra’ees ‘Manthimat Aqbat al-Mahgar’ li-Misr,” *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 13 December 2005. Retrieved from the following URL:

[http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=9877&article=338089&feature=.](http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=9877&article=338089&feature=)

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Sheffer. *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Khachig Tölölyan. “The Nation-State and Its Others” in *Diaspora* 1, 1 (Sp 1991): 3-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ed. Rey Koslowski. *International Migration and the Globalization of Domestic Politics*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Yossi Shain. *Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 128.

<sup>8</sup> Yossi Shain. *Marketing the American Creed Abroad: Diasporas in the U.S. and their Homelands*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>10</sup> Grégoire Delhaye, “Les racines dy dynamisme de la diaspora copte,” *EchoGéo*, 2008. Retrieved from the following URL: <http://echogeo.revues.org/index6963.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Saad Eddin Ibrahim. *The Copts of Egypt* (London: Minority Rights Group, 2006), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Mordechai Nisan. *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (London: McFarland & Company, 1991), 155.

<sup>14</sup> A copy of the letter issued by the Coptic Archdiocese of North America can be located on the Free Copts online journal website, at the following address:

[http://freecopts.net/english/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1154&Itemid=9](http://freecopts.net/english/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1154&Itemid=9).

<sup>15</sup> Fouad Ibrahim and Barbara Ibrahim, “Integrating into a multicultural society—The Case of the Copts in the U.S.”

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Samer Soliman, “The Radical Turn of Coptic Activism: Path to Democracy or Sectarian Politics” in Ed. Nicholas S. Hopkins, “Political and Social Protest in Egypt,” *Cairo Papers*, Vol 29, No. 2. (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 147-148.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Wakin. *A Lonely Minority: The Modern Story of Egypt’s Copts*. (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1963), 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Galal Amin. *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?* (Cairo: New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>21</sup> Wakin, 160.

<sup>22</sup> Ghada H. Talhami. *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 41-41.

- <sup>23</sup> Ayman Zohry. "Interrelationships between Internal and International Migration in Egypt: A Pilot Study." (Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program, American University in Cairo, July 2005), 25-26.
- <sup>24</sup> Fouad Ibrahim and Barbara Ibrahim, "Integrating into a multicultural society—The Case of the Copts in the U.S.," 26.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Sana Hassan. *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: the Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 109.
- <sup>27</sup> John H. Watson. *Among the Copts*. (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 105.
- <sup>28</sup> Talhami, 44.
- <sup>29</sup> Saad Eddin Ibrahim. *The Copts of Egypt* (London: Minority Rights Group, 2006), 19.
- <sup>30</sup> Gilles Kepel. *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: the prophet and the pharaoh*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 159.
- <sup>31</sup> Hassan, 109.
- <sup>32</sup> Jehan Sadat. *A Woman of Egypt*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 437-438.
- <sup>33</sup> Hassan, 109.
- <sup>34</sup> The transcript of Sadat's speech was retrieved from Shawki F. Karas. *The Copts since the Arab Invasion: Strangers in their Own Land*. (Jersey City, New Jersey: American, Canadian and Australian Christian Coptic Associations, 1985), 161-162.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid, 208.
- <sup>36</sup> A copy of the original letter was made available in Karas, 262.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid, 269-270.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, 259.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, 273-275.
- <sup>40</sup> Ninette S. Fahmy, Professor of Political Science, The American University in Cairo. Interview conducted by author, 15 April 2010, Cairo, Egypt.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Youssef Sidhom, Editor-in-Chief, *Watani*. Interview conducted by author, 16 April 2010, Cairo, Egypt.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Magdi Khalil, "The Dialogue Between the Copts and the Egyptian Government." 20 March 2006. The article was retrieved from the following URL:  
[http://freecopts.net/english/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=44&Itemid=9](http://freecopts.net/english/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=44&Itemid=9).
- <sup>45</sup> Michael Meunier, Chairman, U.S. Copts Association. Interview conducted by author, 16 April 2010, Cairo, Egypt.
- <sup>46</sup> A full transcript can be retrieved from the website of the Coptic Assembly of America at the following URL:  
[http://www.copticassembly.org/printart.php?main\\_id=517](http://www.copticassembly.org/printart.php?main_id=517).
- <sup>47</sup> Ninette S. Fahmy, Professor of Political Science, The American University in Cairo. Interview conducted by author, 15 April 2010, Cairo, Egypt.
- <sup>48</sup> Hassan, 109.
- <sup>49</sup> Mohammed Abu-Nimer, I. Khoury Amal, and Emily Welty. *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East*. (Washington, D.C.: USIP Press, 2006), 148.
- <sup>50</sup> Rajab al-Banna. *Al-Aqbat fi Misr wu al-Mahjar: Hiwarat ma'a al-Baba Shanudah*. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1998).
- <sup>51</sup> Mona Makram-Ebeid, Distinguished Lecturer of Political Science, The American University in Cairo. Interview conducted by author, 12 April 2010, Cairo, Egypt.
- <sup>52</sup> See Amr Bebawy, "Al-Baba Shenouda Yousafir ila Amrika lil-'Aalaj wu Tuhadiat Aqbat al-Mahjar qabl Ziyarat 'Mubarak' li-Washinton," *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 30 January 2009. Retrieved from the following URL:  
<http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=196980>.
- <sup>53</sup> See Amr Bebawy, "Al-Baba Shenouda Yourasil Sekritarihu al-Khas li-Istiqbal al-Ray'ees fee Amrika...wu Nubiyoum Yousharikun fee Musirat 'Al-Bayt al-Abyad'," *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 12 August 2009. Retrieved from the following URL: <http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=222272>.
- <sup>54</sup> Michael Meunier, Chairman, U.S. Copts Association. Interview conducted by author, 16 April 2010, Cairo, Egypt.
- <sup>55</sup> Samer Shehata, "After Mubarak, Mubarak?" *Current History*, December 2008, 418.
- <sup>56</sup> Yossi Shain. *Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 149.

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- <sup>57</sup> Youssef Sidhom, Editor-in-Chief, *Watani*. Interview conducted by author, 16 April 2010, Cairo, Egypt.
- <sup>58</sup> The U.S. Copts Association's mission statement can be retrieved from the association's website at the following URL: [http://www.copts.com/english/?page\\_id=14](http://www.copts.com/english/?page_id=14).
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> The Coptic Assembly of America's mission statement can be retrieved from the association's website at the following URL: [http://www.copticassembly.org/showcat.php?main\\_id=12](http://www.copticassembly.org/showcat.php?main_id=12).
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Further information on the Canadian Coptic Association can be retrieved from the association's website at the following URL: [http://www.copticnews.ca/e\\_whoarewe.htm](http://www.copticnews.ca/e_whoarewe.htm).
- <sup>64</sup> Further information on the Canadian Egyptian Organization for Human Rights can be retrieved from the organization's website at the following URL: [http://www.ceohr.org/documents/our\\_objectives.html](http://www.ceohr.org/documents/our_objectives.html).
- <sup>65</sup> Further information on Copts United can be retrieved from the association's website at the following URL: <http://www.coptsunited.com/>.
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- <sup>72</sup> Ibid, 163.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid, 167.
- <sup>75</sup> A copy of the letter can be retrieved from the USCIRF website at the following URL: [http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1337](http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1337).
- <sup>76</sup> A copy of the letter can be retrieved from the USCIRF website at the following URL: [http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1336&Itemid=1](http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1336&Itemid=1).
- <sup>77</sup> A full transcript of the briefing can be retrieved from the USCIRF website at the following URL: [http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=668&Itemid=1](http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=668&Itemid=1).
- <sup>78</sup> A copy of the letter can be retrieved at the website of the Coptic Assembly of America at the following URL: [http://www.copticassembly.org/showart.php?main\\_id=1525](http://www.copticassembly.org/showart.php?main_id=1525).
- <sup>79</sup> Copies of the original letters can be retrieved at from the website of the Coptic Assembly of America at the following URL: [http://www.copticassembly.org/showart.php?main\\_id=1771](http://www.copticassembly.org/showart.php?main_id=1771).
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- <sup>81</sup> A copy of the original letter can be retrieved from the website of the Coptic Assembly of America at the following URL: [http://www.copticassembly.org/showart.php?main\\_id=2277](http://www.copticassembly.org/showart.php?main_id=2277).
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- <sup>90</sup> A copy of the report can be retrieved from the website of Christian Solidarity International at the following URL: [http://www.csi-int.org/pdfs/csi\\_coptic\\_report.pdf](http://www.csi-int.org/pdfs/csi_coptic_report.pdf).
- <sup>91</sup> A copy of the original letter can be retrieved from the website of Christian Solidarity International at the following URL: [http://www.csi-int.org/coptic\\_report\\_pr.php?sId=01272227238&sucHL=1](http://www.csi-int.org/coptic_report_pr.php?sId=01272227238&sucHL=1).
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