Policy Brief on Raising Religious Tolerance in Egypt

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Abstract

Religious intolerance has been an extremely important phenomenon in the Middle East. Religious intolerance can lead to violent clashes between religious groups, thus hindering economic development and national state building. This thesis provides a policy brief on raising religious tolerance in Egypt, one of the largest multi-religion countries in the region. The thesis describes the variation in religious intolerance across time and space in the country, and then describes the current policies affecting religious tolerance undertaken by the various players: the government, the media, the formal religious institutions, and the civil society. The failure of the current policies, it is argued, stems mainly from the excessive intervention of the state in religious life. The main theme of the policy recommendation is to focus on education and freedom of expression through empowering the civil society and launching national campaigns for the spread of values of tolerance and diversity

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The role of religion in Middle Eastern societies has been an extremely important and controversial topic throughout the region's modern history. Traditionally, people in the Middle East resorted to religious institutions (mosques, churches, and synagogues) to provide education to their children. Economic activities were segregated along religious lines, with each religious group dominating a specific set of occupations and activities. With the transition to modernity over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the relationship between members of different religious groups became a first-order concern for the public and the policy makers. A long-standing heritage of discrimination against non-Muslims in specific occupations, a reality of religious conflicts on economic and political means, and an inherited set of discriminatory rules and institutions all appeared to be hindering the region's shift to modernization.

In this context, the task of designing a coherent public policy aiming at enhancing religious tolerance in the society seems to be of utmost importance. This becomes crucial in a country like Egypt, one of the largest Middle Eastern countries in terms of population, and a country with the largest non-Muslim population in the Middle East (Egyptian Christians or Copts). The fact that Egypt is a multi-religion country, where non-Muslims represent 6% of the Egyptian population, and the facts about tensions between religious groups and incidents of religious intolerance and violence throughout the country's history makes designing such policy a necessity. This public policy should involve all actors: government, media, civil society, and formal religious institutions.

The importance of examining religious tolerance in Egypt stems from various reasons. First, increasing religious intolerance can hinder economic development. Violent clashes between religious groups can make the economy unstable, reduce the investors' confidence in the economy, and slow down economic growth. In the extreme case, religious intolerance can reach civil war, such as what happened in Lebanon 1975-90, and can destroy the infrastructure and the economy.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, religious tensions in Egypt, and in the Middle East at large, is one of the major obstacles to building a national modern state. As Bruce (2003, pp. 41-93) pointed out, the experiments of building nation-states worldwide have varied from nationalism with a strong religious identity, nationalism with a weak religious identity, to nationalism with a secular face. Poland and Ireland represent classical examples for nationalism with a strong religious identity. A common element in these experiments is the homogeneity of the population that is united in a single religion, which allows the nationalist leaders to mobilize the population behind this religious identity. Other nationalist experiments mobilized weaker religious identities, such as in Russia, Croatia, or Serbia. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, there exists the nationalist experiments with secular identity. This experiment usually evolves in multi-religion societies, and views the traditional cultures as obstacles to economic growth. It is this latter type of nationalism that was dominant in Egypt and in other parts of the Middle East, because of the multi-religion nature of its societies. However, this nationalist experiment did not succeed in shifting the country into a developed nation, nor did it establish a nation-state upon principles of citizenship. Institutions and laws that discriminate between Muslims and non-Muslims, such as regarding the laws governing building mosques versus churches, are still in place. Despite this nationalist experiment, Non-Muslims are still inhibited from accessing

specific occupations such as the high ranks in the military, the judiciary, and the police. In this context, religious intolerance can be seen as a manifestation, a consequence, or even a cause of the failure of the secular nationalist experiment. It is thus necessary to examine the public policies that can reduce intolerance and help the nationalist experiment come to fruition, and this is more important in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution.

Finally, religious intolerance towards non-Muslims can be explained, at least partially, by economic reasons. Non-Muslims are, on average, better off than the Muslim majority. They have higher literacy rates, and are in higher social status occupations (Issawi 1981). This economic inequality, which is manifested in religious conflicts, is a very important issue in the economic development agenda of Egypt and the Middle East. It becomes even more important with the current focus on social justice after the 2011 revolution. It is because of the aforementioned aspects that this thesis attempts to develop public policies aiming at raising religious tolerance.

The goal of this thesis is to describe, assess, and evaluate the current public policies that affect religious tolerance in Egypt, and to recommend a set of public policies aiming at enhancing religious tolerance based on the experiences of other countries. The analysis will first provide a background on religious tolerance in the country across time and space. The thesis will then describe the current public policies that are related to religious tolerance. It will then provide an assessment of the impact of the public policies: Were the policies effective or not? An evaluation of why the public policies succeeded or failed will follow. Finally, the thesis will recommend a set of public policies that are expected to mitigate the chances of religious conflicts.

Chapter 2: Religious Tolerance in Egypt across Time and Space

Since the Islamic Conquest of Egypt in 641 AD, the relationship between Muslims and Christians has been a dominant subject in the Egyptian political scene. Muslims, who first arrived in Egypt as a small conquering army, expanded over the centuries due to the gradual conversion of Egyptian Christians (known as Copts) to Islam to constitute the vast majority of the population. During the long period that elapsed since the Islamic Conquest, the relationship between the shrinking Coptic minority and the growing Muslim majority took various forms, and the level of religious tolerance between the two groups varied dramatically across both time and space. Religious tolerance (or lack thereof) reflected, to a great extent, the prevalent Islamic ideology in the society at a given point in time and space. Other factors such as conflicts with foreign powers and conflicts between Muslims and Christians over economic means impacted the level of religious tolerance that was determined by the prevalent ideology. It is my goal in this chapter to describe the change in levels of religious tolerance in Egypt across time and space. I will then explore the role of the prevalent Islamic popular ideologies at a given place and time such as Sufism and Salafism in impacting the observed level of religious tolerance.

2.1 Religious Tolerance in Egypt Across Time

Prior to the 19th century, religious tolerance of Muslims towards Copts witnessed various waves of ups and downs. Despite the general tranquility that characterized the relationship in general, there were episodes of heightened tensions and fanaticism between the two religious groups. In the first two centuries after the Conquest high taxation and strict enforcement of the taxes ignited a series of Coptic revolts against the state. During the reign of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim

(996-1020), the state imposed various discriminatory rules against non-Muslims (the vast majority of whom were Copts), and these rules triggered wide violence against non-Muslims from the Muslim community (Tagher 1998, pp. 100-9). However, the most significant period of high religious intolerance towards Copts remains that of the Mamluk period (1250-1517), where repeated incidents of mass violence against Copts erupted (Tagher 1998, pp. 142-64). For example, Al-Maqrizi (2002, pp. 1066-76) describes the incident of burning a large number of churches nationwide by angry Muslim mobs that took place in this period. This mass violence was paralleled by discrimination on part of the state which attempted to dispense of Coptic services in the bureaucracy. This wave of religious intolerance was mainly motivated by the conflict with the foreign Crusaders and the economic conflicts between Muslims and Copts who monopolized the administrative jobs.

Although Napoleon's expedition in the late 18th century and the subsequent rule of Muhammad Ali Pasha in 1805-48 date the birth of the "modern" state of Egypt, various elements of religious intolerance were preserved and nurtured during this period. Perhaps similar to the rising intolerance towards Copts in the Mamluk period that was motivated by the Crusades, Baer (1983, pp. 33-54) points out that the Egyptian revolts against the short-lived French occupation in 1798-1801 witnessed religious fervor that was directed against Copts. In response to a call to "kill the Christians and wage a Jihad against them," Copts and other non-Coptic Christians in Egypt suffered most from the Muslim mobs. In the following half century, Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt who was de facto autonomous, embarked on an ambitious modernization project in production, education, irrigation, and the army. Despite the dominant secular, and in particular Westernized, character of this modernization experiment as evidenced in its institutions, Baer stresses the fact that the Islamic motives remained dominant for the wide

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masses. For instance, he records the anti-Coptic activities that occurred in the peasants' rebellions against the government during the first half of the nineteenth century. Although these revolts were generally ignited by secular motives such as high taxation and general suffering, some were characterized by a clear Islamic motive. However, Tagher (1998, pp. 195-223) points out that the rule of Muhammad Ali was in general tolerant towards Copts, at least with respect to the government. Copts and other non-Muslims were widely employed in the state in this period. Al-Mu'allem Ghali, a renowned Copt, was responsible for the state's finances under Muhammad Ali.

The second half of the 19th century witnessed accelerated steps towards adopting the European institutions and the European legal system. The state attempted in this period to integrate non-Muslims in the Egyptian society through progressive measures. In 1855, the poll tax on non-Muslims (jizya) was abolished and non-Muslims were conscripted into the Egyptian army for the first time since the Islamic Conquest (Tagher 1998, p. 204). Around the same time, Egyptians were allowed promotion to officers' ranks for the first time (before that, officers' ranks were confined to Turks, the ruling elite) (Al-Raf'i 1987, p. 35), and it appears that local non-Muslims were not excluded from this privilege. Historical evidence demonstrates that the rulers of Egypt at the time were conscious of the role of these measures as integrating devices for the non-Muslim minorities. For example, a statement by Khedive Ismail from that period emphasizes how he was propagating for the equality of Muslims and Copts in the army: "*Look at this battalion... There are there Arabs and Copts, Mussulmans and Christians, that march in the same rank. I assure you that not one of them troubles himself about his comrade' s religion. Equality between them is complete.*" (Charmes 1883, p. 161).

Nonetheless, it remains controversial whether this religious tolerance towards non-Muslims was confined to the state or was indeed a widespread practice among the Egyptian Muslim masses. An illuminating evidence in this regard comes from the first Egyptian nationalist revolt against the ruling Turkish elite and the British occupation in 1881 that largely resulted from these state progressive measures. Overall, despite the secular goals of this revolt and the fact that it was led by the same Egyptian army officers who were recently promoted to officers' ranks, it also incorporated elements of fanaticism and anti-Coptic activities. During the revolt, Muslim farmers in many places in the Nile Delta and the Nile Valley attacked and even massacred non-Muslims including Copts, Greeks, and Jews (Baer 1983, p. 39).

But were the modernization attempts at increasing the integration of Copts into the Egyptian society totally fruitless? Two events in the first half of the 20th century deserve close attention. First, in 1911 a sharp conflict between Muslims and Copts erupted over the representation of Copts in governmental positions and the discrimination against Copts in the high ranked jobs (Baer 1983, p. 41). This came soon after the assassination of the first Coptic prime minister of Egypt in the modern period, an event that had a religious, and not only political, motivation. Second, in 1919 Egyptians took to the streets in massive demonstrations against the British Occupation, and the revolution resulted in the declaration of the independence of the country in 1922. The revolution witnessed Copts and Muslims protesting together side by side against the British, and the slogan of the revolution was "Long live the crescent with the cross," with a flag containing both the crescent and the cross, and thus symbolizing the unity of Muslims and Copts against the British Occupation.

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A flag showing the crescent and the cross, symbolizing the unity of Muslims and Christians in the 1919 Egyptian Revolution against the British Occupation (1882-1922). The slogan of the revolution was "Long live the crescent with the cross!"

The 1952 military coup led to the birth of a state-led secular modernization program throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The program included the expansion of modern education as well as state industrialization. With its focus on social justice and the spread of education among the masses, the program helped to integrate Muslims and Copts within the same social texture. Nonetheless, the defeat of Egypt in the six-day war in 1967 brought an end to this program, and led to the rising popularity of the more radical Islamist groups, the most prominent of which was the Muslim Brotherhood (founded in 1928) (Gomaa 1983, pp. 143-59). This led to a new wave of religious intolerance towards Copts starting from the 1970s that lasted until today. This wave was manifested in various attacks over Coptic churches and Coptic subjects throughout the last four decades.

During Mubarak's era, various incidents of religious intolerance against Copts erupted. In particular, the 1990s witnessed the rise of violence of the radical Islamist groups in Egypt. These

groups committed various attacks against the Coptic population mainly in the Nile Valley (Abdel-Fattah 1995, pp. 193-208). In the first decade of the 21st century, Copts reported unconfirmed incidents of kidnapping Coptic girls and forcing them to convert to Islam. The rising tensions escalated in the aftermath of the attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria on January 1, 2011. Various theories accused Mubarak's regime of standing behind this attack. The reasoning is that such attacks on Copts were tactical to widen the gaps and divisions in the society in order to ensure the stronghold of the regime.

However, less than a month later, the Egyptian Revolution erupted on January 25th, 2011. During the revolution, no incidents of religious violence were recorded. On the contrary, it appears that the revolution witnessed a high degree of tolerance and harmony between Muslims and Christians. It was only in the aftermath of the revolution that incidents of religious violence were recorded. Several clashes and incidents of burning churches occurred in the year that elapsed since the revolution. This coincided with the rise of the Islamists' power and popularity in the Egyptian street as the new majority political group on the political scene.

2.2 Religious Tolerance in Egypt Across Space

In light of the scarcity of historical statistics, one is unable to determine precisely the geographic variation in the level of religious tolerance over time. Perhaps, an illuminating historical evidence prior to the modern period comes from Al-Maqrizi (2002, pp. 1066-76). As mentioned in the previous section, Al-Maqrizi describes in his book perhaps the most important incident of mass religious intolerance in Egyptian history known as the "Incident of the Churches," in which Muslim mobs in the 14th century attacked and burned a large number of churches nationwide. Fortunately, Al-Maqrizi records in his book the location of the churches that were attacked as

well as the other churches in the location that were left intact. Table (2.1) shows the spatial distribution of this incident of religious intolerance in Egypt based on the information in Al-Maqrizi:

Table (2.1): Geographic Variation in Religious Tolerance in 14th Century Egypt

Current Province	Total Number of Churches	Percentage of Churches
Urban Centers:		
Cairo	48	40%
Alexandria	9	44%
Suez	5	0%
Damietta	4	25%
Nile Delta:		
Al-Daqahliya	1	0%
Al-Sharqiya	4	0%
Al-Gharbiya	9	33%
Al-Menoufiya	1	0%
Al-Beheira	5	60%
Nile Valley:		
Al-Giza	19	84%
Beni-Souef	8	38%
Al-Fayum	0	0%
Al-Minya	33	24%
Asyut	69	33%
Sohag	14	50%
Qena	23	39%
Aswan	5	100%

Source: Author's calculations based on Al-Maqrizi (2002, pp. 1066-76).

From table (2.1), one can see that the intensity of religious intolerance was higher in the Nile Valley (South) and in the urban centers compared to the Nile Delta (North). Part of this is because of the larger concentration of Copts in the Nile Valley, which makes the conflict more likely to occur.

In the modern period, there is little evidence on the geographic distribution of the incidents of religious intolerance towards Copts throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century. It seems that these incidents were widespread throughout the country. Nonetheless, Abdel-Fattah (1995, pp. 193-208) documents the geographic distribution of all the incidents of Islamist radical violence towards Copts that took place in 1995. This information is summarized in table (2.2):

Table (2.2): Geographic Distribution of Religious Tolerance in 1995 Egypt

Region	Number of Violent Incidents Against Non-Muslims
Urban Centers	1
Nile Delta	0
Nile Valley	7

Source: Abdel-Fattah (1995, pp. 193-208)

From this table, it appears that the incidents of violence against non-Muslims were concentrated in the Nile Valley just as was the case in the 14th century. Two reasons may explain this pattern: First, as mentioned before, the Nile Valley represents the largest concentration of Copts in Egypt. One can add to this the fact that the Nile Valley is the major destination of tourists in Egypt because of the ancient Egyptian monuments. This may have motivated some of the violent incidents towards non-Muslim tourists. Second, the Nile Valley is the poorest region in Egypt and is far away from Cairo, the capital, so it provided a suitable environment for radical

Islamism as well as for violence that was far away from the heavy hand of the central government.

2.3 Ideological Roots of Religious Tolerance

Can the observed changes over time and space in religious tolerance towards Copts be explained by the prevalent Islamic ideology? This question is very important in order to understand the required criteria in designing a public policy with the goal of raising religious tolerance between Muslims and Copts. I will focus on this section on two major schools of Islamic practice: Sufism and Salafism. Sufism emerged in Egypt as early as the 12th century (Gilsenan 1973, p. 1), and was the default form of Islam in Egypt by the modern period (Brown 2011). As Brown points out, Sufism is not a school of jurisprudence or a sect of Islam but is rather a way of practicing Islam. Sufism emphasizes the mystical character of religion, and the role of saints and Sufi paths/orders in helping the individual in finding the way to God. On the other hand, Salafism refers to the revival of the way Islam was believed to be practiced under the prophet Muhammad and his early followers. Salafis view the early period of Islam as the "golden age," and they thus believe that the current backwardness of Muslims could be only overcome if Muslims adhere to the practice of Islam in this period (Brown 2011). Historically, Salafism emerged in the 13th century as a counter reaction to the rigidities of Islamic jurisprudence, the hierarchies of the Sufi orders, and to what Salafis perceived as the general corruption of Islamic practice (Brown 2011; Mansour 2000, pp. 103-38). It then became more popular in the 18th century (mainly in the Arab peninsula).

With respect to their ideological stances towards non-Muslims, Sufism seems to be tolerant to other religions. Ibn-Arabi, one of the leading Sufi figures in the 12th century has once said: "My

heart has become capable of every form; it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks, and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba, and the tablets of the Torah and the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith." Hoffman (1995; pp. 328-56) describes how Sufi popular Islam in Egypt has a common spirituality with Coptic Christianity that is often overlooked. This common mystical character is manifested in the belief in saints (Copts add to the list of saints the martyrs that suffered from persecution of the authorities throughout Egyptian history), as well as in the religious festivals. Hassan (2009, pp. 283-6) reports the results of a survey carried out among the followers of two major Sufi orders in Egypt in 1995. In the questions that attempt to measure the values of religious tolerance/fanaticism, the majority of the respondents showed a tolerant attitude towards people with different beliefs or practices. For example, about 90% of the sample answered a question about the attitude towards a person who does not believe in Sufism by saying that they would discuss his opinion and try to persuade him or they would leave him/her without discussion. Only one individual in the sample said that he would fight with the disagreeing person in this case.

The stance of Salafis towards non-Muslims is more ambiguous. Brown (2011) states that there are two polar attitudes of the Salafis towards society in general. One viewpoint favors political quietism and submission for the ruler as long as he is technically a Muslim. Another viewpoint states that if the ruler ceases to be Muslim then violent resistance is required. If one applies this logic to the attitude towards non-Muslims, it appears that Salafism has a broad spectrum that may allow for both kinds of behavior towards opponents (tolerance and violence).

But can we explain the observed variation in religious tolerance across time and space by the dominant Islamic ideology? The fact that most of the incidents of religious intolerance towards

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Copts in 1995 were concentrated in the Nile Valley can indeed be explained by the dominance of the violent Islamist groups in this region, i.e. the Salafis that believe in violent resistance to change the society into the early Islamic model. It is worth mentioning here, however, that the Nile Valley is historically a stronghold of Sufism but the radical Islamists chose it as a hub for their militant activity perhaps because of its relative isolation. Nonetheless, it is hard to make a general conclusion that Sufism and Salafism are what explain tolerance towards Copts or lack thereof. The waves of religious tolerance that erupted throughout history had very complicated motives and many of them occurred when Sufism was still the dominant form of Islam in Egypt. It is thus safer to conclude that religious tolerance is a complicated phenomenon that cannot be explained solely by the prevalent ideology.

Chapter 3: Policies Affecting Religious Tolerance in Egypt: Description

Egypt witnessed various policies aiming at increasing the level of religious tolerance and integrating religious groups. This chapter describes the policies adopted by the Egyptian government, the media, the formal religious institutions, and the civil society.

3.1 Government

3.1.1 Ministry of Education

According to the website of the Egyptian Ministry of Education, one of the major principles of educational policy in Egypt is to spread values of pluralism, tolerance, and acceptance of the other. In fact, since the 1952 revolution, the Egyptian educational policy has focused on integrating religious groups in the same schools. Prior to the 1950s, the vast majority of the Muslim population was attending elementary religious schools (*kuttabs*) (Cochran 1986). Non-Muslims, and because of their higher socioeconomic status were mainly attending private modern schools. The supply of public modern schools was limited to the urban centers, and enrolled a tiny percentage of the population) (Cochran 1986). In 1953, and in the aftermath of the 1952 revolution, the government decided to transform all elementary religious schools into public modern schools that enrolled both Muslims and non-Muslims (Harbi 1960). Moreover, the government integrated the private modern schools, in particular the foreign ones, into the Egyptian educational system, by reducing their fees, harmonizing their curricula, and increasing the urban middle classes' access to them (Harbi 1960; Salama 1963; Cochran 1986). The curricula continued to include religion (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) as a subject but was

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graded only as a pass-fail grade and was not added to the final grade so as not to alter fair competition (Harbi 1960)

These policies remained in effect until today. However, the last decade of Mubarak's era witnessed the rapid growth of a new generation of foreign and international schools with very expensive tuition fees (Al-Sa'adani 2012). While many of these schools were integrated, a new genre of schools confined only to Muslim students, known as the "Islamic schools," emerged. The emergence of these schools can be attributed at least partially to the rising influence of Salafi or Wahhabi Islam, that was imported from the Gulf. These new Islamic schools promoted a rigid Islamic identity that brought up the students according to the values of Wahhabi Islam. The curriculum of the schools was more focused on teaching Islamic subjects rather than the typical secular curricula taught at public, private, or other international schools. Islamic schools were first founded by religious civil society organizations with ties to Muslim Brotherhood (Nassar 2008). And then when this model became trendy, corrupt businessmen aiming at making quick profits started following the trend and establishing more Islamic schools.

3.1.2 Ministry of Culture

With the spread of violent Islamic movement and the rise of terrorist attacks in the nineties especially against intellectual figures and government officials as well as Western tourists, the state thought that one way to combat such spread is by supporting different cultural initiatives through the Ministry of Culture. According to Winegar (2009), "unprecedented numbers of new cultural institutions have been built or renovated throughout the country, including libraries, museums, culture palaces and houses, and creativity centers. These host thousands of public programs every year. The government has also started two new television channels devoted

specifically to culture (*thaqafa*). Book fairs and art biennials have increased in number and expanded, new cultural periodicals and book series have been published, and new cultural competitions and prizes created. Nearly every day in the state press, one finds articles and announcements detailing cultural events and programs, as well as editorials on the importance of *thaqafa* to Egyptian society." The aim was to create citizens committed to national high culture and, in this regard, Islam is considered only one component of such national high culture in opposition to the Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood who has posed Islam as the sole solution (Winegar 2009).

Cultural production in Egypt is highly affected by censorship whether on books or movies or any other form of cultural production (Farid 2012) which hinders freedom of expression, the level of censorship in Egypt has on some occasions exceeded those even in the Gulf countries.

3.1.3 Ministry of *Waqfs* (Religious Endowments)

Historically, a *waqf* was a property endowed by its owner, such that its future rent or revenues are dedicated to serve a specific charity purpose. Some of these possible charity purposes could be financing a mosque, a school, a water fountain, or a *tikiya* (hostel for poor members of Sufi orders) (Abdel-Fattah 1995, p. 59). Islamic *waqfs* emerged in the early 11th century, and were the main financing devices for the spread of Islamic propagation. For example, El-Azhar, the major Islamic institution in Egypt (See section 3.3), as well as other Islamic institutions, relied on the *waqfs* for their funding, which gave them financial independence from the state. In the aftermath of the 1952 revolution, however, and in the state's efforts to secularize the country, the state granted the Ministry of *Waqfs* the right to supervise all charity endowments in Egypt. Besides, a law was passed in 1957 that distributed the agricultural land that was endowed to finance

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mosques and other Islamic activities to the Authority of Agricultural Reform, i.e. made it completely under the state's power. Interestingly, this law was only for Islamic endowments and excluded the endowments of the non-Muslim population. This resulted in the fact that the Coptic Church retained large pieces of land that financed Christian propagation under its disposal, unlike the Muslim institutions, that lost their financial independence almost completely and became governmental departments. (Abdel-Fattah 1995, pp. 59-62).

Besides this basic role of the Ministry of Religious Endowments, from which it derives its title, the ministry became also responsible for supervising the mosques since the 1952 revolution (Abdel-Fattah 1995, pp. 63-5). This role became increasingly critical since the 1970s that witnessed the rise of the radical Islamist movements in Egypt and throughout Mubarak's era (1981-2011). In particular, the ministry is responsible for appointing the preachers at all the mosques of the country, as well as providing them with the essential training. This is particularly important because the rise of the radical Islamist groups was mainly because of their dominance over remote and small mosques that the ministry was unable to reach. However, despite the ministry's attempts to supervise all the mosques in the country, the rapid growth of non-governmental mosques since the 1970s made these attempts largely unsuccessful. According to Abdel-Fattah (1995, p. 65), the number of governmental mosques in Egypt in 1995 reached 2,400, whereas the number of non-governmental mosques that were completely outside the reach of the ministry stood at 120,000.

3.2 Media

3.2.1 Ministry of Information

According to the official website of the Egyptian Ministry of Information, the ministry was founded in 1952, with the goal of propagating for the new political regime in Egypt. It remained loyal to this goal throughout Sadat's and Mubarak's era. The secular feature of the state-controlled media in Egypt was always dominant. For example, state TV presenters were not allowed to appear wearing veil (headscarves) (Al-Wafd 2011). The religious content of the state media was carefully monitored so as to ban conservative Islamist thought with all its variations from public appearance. Thinkers and preachers belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafis, or the more radical wings of Islamist thought were all banned from appearing in the state media. Only "governmental" or state-approved Islamic thinkers, who usually belonged to the formal religious institutions such as El-Azhar, were allowed to appear on the media. On the other hand, the official Christian festivities, such as the Coptic Church's official celebration of the Christmas, were always aired on state TV. In short, only state-approved religious institutions, figures, and events were allowed on state TV. The situation in the state-dominated newspapers was not different, although more freedom and diversity was normally granted because of the smaller audience in a population where illiteracy is as high as 34%.

The 2011 revolution introduced important changes to these state policies. With Islamists dominating the political scene, they were given the chance to appear in state-controlled media for the first time in the media's history. In March 2011, only one month after the revolution, TV presenters who were wearing the veil were allowed to appear on state TV (Al-Wafd 2011).

3.2.2 Private Media

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The situation with the private media sector, whether TV or newspapers, was different. The last decade of Mubarak's rule saw the rise of several private TV channels that were funded by the Gulf countries. These channels became the main devices of spreading religious conservatism in the Egyptian society (Field and Hamam 2009). They were mainly advocating the Wahhabi or Salafi propaganda that is supported by Saudi Arabia with its focus on the apparent conformism with Islamic teachings, without dealing with the more philosophically sophisticated issues. These channels were generally tolerated by the Egyptian regime, just as they were tolerated by the Saudi government, since they propagated for a pacifist agenda that banned the revolution against Muslim rulers and totally refrained from politics, unlike the politicized Muslim Brotherhood or radical Islamist groups (Field and Hamam 2009). It has been claimed that these private channels played an important role in spreading intolerance towards non-Muslims in the society.

3.3 Formal Religious Institutions

3.3.1 El-Azhar

El-Azhar has been the main Islamic religious institution in Egypt since it was founded in 972 AD. Throughout the ages, El-Azhar remained an independent institution funded through the Islamic *waqfs*. In 1961, the Egyptian president Nasser extended the state's control over El-Azhar and limited its independence. In particular, he changed the law that governed El-Azhar and allowed the state to control the institution's financial resources (Abdel-Fattah 1995, p. 28). This loss of financial independence, besides the state's control over the high ranked Muslim clergy in El-Azhar resulted in the institution's loss of its credibility in front of the Egyptian masses. The public vacuum left by the largest Islamic institution in the country was filled by new informal

Islamist powers that emerged with more independence from the state and thus more credibility. These Islamist groups gained more popularity especially after the six day war in 1967 although they were less tolerant. The fact that they were resisting the state represented in the more tolerant yet corrupt and heavily monitored formal religious institutions such as El-Azhar, only raised their popularity during Sadat's and Mubarak's eras.

After the 2011 revolution, important changes occurred in El-Azhar. It appears that the institution started to regain its traditional role in the society, or at least is attempting to do so, in front of the rising influence of the Islamist groups. For example, El-Azhar made an initiative by issuing a draft for the constitutional principles that should form the basis of the future post-revolution constitution of the country. The main goal of El-Azhar's document is to protect the civil nature of the state, the basic individual liberties and human right, including the rights of women and minorities, and the freedom of faith, and expression, in the face of the expected dominance of Islamist groups, who formed the majority in the first post-revolution parliament, over the constitution. (Sorrour 2012)

3.3.2 Coptic Orthodox Church

The 1952 revolution attempted to extend the state's control over the Coptic Church, in the same way that it tried to include El-Azhar (Abdel-Fattah 1995, pp. 81-104). The main goal was to turn the major religious institutions in the country into propagating devices for Nasser's program. The close friendship that emerged between Cyril VI, the Coptic pope at the time, and Nasser facilitated this inclusion. However, the Church retained larger independence than El-Azhar, because of the preservation of the way of choosing the pope away from the state. The tension between the state and the church emerged with the change in leadership, i.e. the accession of

Sadat to presidency, and Pope Shenouda III to papacy. This tension reached its maximum with Sadat's decision to put the pope under home arrest in a monastery in which he remained even after Sadat's assassination over the period 1981-4. The reasons for these tensions, that were not completely solved, yet were mitigated under Mubarak, are many. Besides the rising influence of Islamist groups, and the general tendency of popular Islam towards more conservatism and intolerance, the law governing building churches remained a major heated issue that resulted in many episodes of violence. The rules governing this process date back from an old Ottoman decree in 1856 and a decree by the Ministry of Interior from 1934 (Abdel Fattah 1995, p 88). The problem is that while the Egyptian law generally allows building mosques easily, building churches according to the aforementioned decrees is a way more sophisticated process that requires the approval of the president (later the decision was granted to the governor of the province). During the last decades, there have been many calls for issuing a "unified" law to regulate building both Muslim and Coptic institutions. Yet, this law never came to light even after the 2011 revolution.

3.4 Civil society

3.4.1 Sufi Orders

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Sufism has been the default form of popular Islam in Egypt for centuries. In the aftermath of the 1952 revolution, the state did not attempt to control the Sufi orders right away and left these orders in relative independence (Abdel-Fattah 1995, pp. 273-6). However, interestingly, most of the Sufi orders became very loyal to the new regime (Hassan 2009, pp. 166-84). It was only in 1976 that the government "nationalized" the Sufi orders and intervened in their administration. The Sufi orders remained loyal to Mubarak's regime and

mostly members in the ruling party until the 2011 revolution. Because of their relative tolerance towards non-Muslims and other secular Muslims, alliance with Sufis after the 2011 revolution became a strategy of secular parties to combat the large influence of the Islamist groups.

3.4.2 Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was founded in 1928 and since then it represented the focal group of political Islam in Egypt and the Middle East. Since its foundation, the MB adopted a more conservative Islamic ideology that was critical of the dominant Sufi practices, aimed at reforming the society along the pure Islamic lines, and propagated for a "general" reform agenda (Abdel Fattah 1995, pp163-180). The MB clashed with the 1952 revolution after its initial support, and remained an illegal group throughout Sadat's and Mubarak's eras. However, the MB generally participated in parliamentary elections as independents or under another political party. The MB's stance towards non-Muslims stems from applying the Islamic laws, including the poll tax (gizya) and banning non-Muslims from reaching the top ranks in the state. Generally, however, the MB distanced itself from the violent and more radical Islamist groups that were involved in the violent attacks over non-Muslims. The role of the MB increased dramatically after the 2011 revolution as they formed the new majority party in the parliament winning 47% of the seats. Both the MB and Salafis, represented in Al-Nour party, are dominating the formation of the post-Egyptian constitution which will define the nature of the state and the rights and freedom of religious minorities.

3.4.3 Salafi Groups

Salafis in Egypt represent a wide array of groups that do not fall under a single organization unlike the MB. The role of Salafis grew after the 2011 revolution, as they won 25% of the

parliament's seats, through their major party (Al-Nour). Some Salafi leaders played a role in solving conflicts between Muslims and Christians in their local communities.[1] On the other hand, those who are more represented among the Salafis are generally more conservative, fanatic, and much less tolerant, and they have no understanding of the values of diversity. One major incident that elaborates how Mubarak's regime was working only for its own interest was the regime's possible involvement in the terrorist attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria in early 2011. Right after the 2011 revolution, British intelligence leaked news regarding the incident which resulted in the death of 23 and the injury of 93. The news was that it was Mubarak's minister of interior who was behind the attack and that he had hired some Islamist extremists to carry out the attack (Fadl 2012). The goal was to cause tension between Muslims and Christians, so that they will not pay attention to the corruption of the regime, and at the same time, to give the government a good excuse to become even more violent with civilians in the name of protecting the security of the country.

3.4.4 Muslim and Coptic Civil Organizations

The 1952 revolution regulated the civil organizations and attempted to include the organizations under the bureaucratic power (Abdel-Fattah 1995, pp. 233-71). The vast majority of the Muslim and Coptic civil organizations are located in Cairo and Alexandria. They mainly provide charity and social services to the middle and lower classes of each religious group (e.g. Association for Garbage Collectors; Association of Muslim Youth). While the state usually allowed these organizations a space for operation, doubts have been casted over the funding roles and the

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[1] For example, a Salafi Sheikh in Alexandria played a role in early 2012 when tensions between Muslims and Christians erupted and it was mentioned in the newspapers that Christians were forced to leave the neighborhood. A delegation from the parliament was formed for fact-finding and what they found out was breath-taking. When Christians were asked to report what happened to the delegation, they nominated the Salafi Sheikh to represent them and it turned out that this Salafi sheikh is the most trustworthy leadership in their small community and they always resort to him to judge on different conflicts (El-Naggar 2012).

ideological bases of many of these organizations, especially the Islamic ones. It has been claimed that some of these civil organizations are connected with radical Islamist groups (Abdelfattah 1995, pp.241-2).

The role of the civil society became of increasing importance after the 2011 revolution. The SCAF initiated a campaign against many civil organizations, mainly foreign ones, under the claim that they threaten national security and independence (Abul-Ezz and Tuhami 2011). However, many observers criticized this campaign which excluded the Islamic civil organizations that are connected with the Salafi or Wahhabi trend and that are funded by the Gulf countries. These observers noted that these organizations were responsible for spreading the more conservative thought in the Egyptian population (Abul-Ezz and Tuhami 2011).

Chapter 4: Policies Affecting Religious Tolerance in Egypt: Assessment and Evaluation

4.1 Government

4.1.1 Ministry of Education

Nasser's educational reforms was successful in integrating all religious groups and narrowing the educational gap between Muslims and Christians in Egypt (Saleh 2012). However, several measures in the schooling system constitute obstacles to full integration. The first encounter of children to different religions is at their first grade where Christian students are asked to *leave* the classroom to attend their Christianity course in a separate classroom. Muslim students, on their part, *stay* in the classroom to take the Islam course. Most people in Egypt have these childhood memories engraved in their minds as their first introduction to the other. Unfortunately, this introduction is not very fruitful: No awareness of different religions is presented; no awareness of the sensitivity of the situation in the minds of the kids is cultivated. This results in Christian students' feeling that they are a minority and different from the majority, and Muslim students' feeling that Christians are not like them, without any understanding of the values of the diversity and pluralism. However, although most people tackling this issue would suggest stopping teaching religions at schools, I am personally against this suggestion since the alternative would be taking children to mosques and churches to learn about their religion. And as I stated in the previous chapter, most non-governmental mosques in Egypt as well as churches are independent. Most of these mosques are controlled by different Islamist groups and they might feed the children with more radical views on religion than what is being taught in schools.

As for Islamic schools, they induced segregation between the citizens of Egypt and made their schools inaccessible for Christians. They also allowed the students of those Islamic schools to grow up in an non-pluralistic world, knowing nothing about different religions, and having no friends of different religions to help them make informed opinions about the other. This makes students even more vulnerable to becoming victims of misconceptions about other religions. And needless to say that most of these schools do not teach the true values of Islam but they only provide a negative example of private non-monitored educational model in Egypt.

4.1.2 Ministry of Culture

During the nineties, many cultural palaces were established to target the lower classes of urban and rural populations, women, and children to fight religious ignorance and extremism. That was a shift from the original socialist goal of the cultural palaces upon their introduction by Nasser's regime in the sixties, where they mainly targeted workers and peasants to spread values of social equality and social justice. The main similarity between Mubarak's and Nasser's regimes is that these cultural policies were imposed on the people by top planners without considering the true needs and wants of the people, and without involving them into the decision-making process. Yet the main difference is that Nasser was a charismatic leader whom the people trusted and believed as they thought that he represented them and worked for their own interest. Mubarak, on the other hand, had low popularity because of the high corruption levels of his administration. This low popularity is one of the main reasons why there was popular resistance to any state-led initiative and thus the complete failure of those initiatives. In consequence, people resorted to the other extreme, the religious state, as opposed to the secular model that Mubarak's regime advocated for.

Because of the high level of censorship on cultural production in the country, anyone that did not abide by the regime's propaganda was banned, including all Islamist literature, books, and articles, any form of Christian art, and any liberal or secular attempt to criticize the religious institutions or the regime's institutions. This censorship led to the oppression of different religious groups, as well as the cultural segregation between groups. It also led to the spread of only one "acceptable" viewpoint about any major problem, since critical thinking was generally not encouraged. This resulted in turning the population into a narrow-minded group that does not accept or appreciate diversity.

4.1.3 Ministry of *Waqfs* (Religious Endowments)

The policy of limiting the independence of El-Azhar in the nationalist attempt to secularize the country resulted in the counter-reaction of turning the country into more fanaticism both because of the sudden change of the state policies and because the forbidden is the most desired. Also, the anomalous situation of not taking away the churches' *Waqf* resources while taking away the mosques' resources, which remained until today, became a source of tension between Muslims and Christians, with Muslim institutions demanding for equality with the Coptic institutions.

4.2 Media

The closure of the public media outlets against all viewpoints but the formal regime ones, led to the emergence of more fanatic private media channels and newspapers funded by the Gulf and advocating less tolerant views. These private channels provided financial sources for the so-called the true preachers of Islam although they are the leftovers of El-Azhar sheikhs. Such oppression on part of the official media channels resulted in the loss of credibility of the formal regime and the rise of the Islamists (much more conservative than average Muslims)

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phenomenon as the only opponent of the formal corrupt regime. The result of the Islamists' rising popularity is the spread of intolerance towards Egyptian Christians.

4.3 Formal Religious Institutions

The heavy state intervention on formal religious institutions led to the empowering of more radical informal religious groups that had more credibility. Also, because of the limitations on building or repairing an existing church, Christians do not feel they have equal rights to Muslims. These restrictions resulted in the increased isolation of Christians in Egypt and the widespread of non-official churches where a person can just turn his/her house into a place where people gather to practice their religion. The Christians' feeling of bitterness resulted in a wider gap between Muslims and Christians and the spread of hatred and tensions between the two groups. More extreme Christian groups, especially those based in the United States, even called for international intervention to solve the Christian problem (Ezzat 2011). Such irresponsible acts on part of some Christian groups are used by the extreme Islamist groups that have popularity among the illiterate masses to portray Christians in a negative light. It is worth mentioning in this regard that the vast majority of the Egyptian population is tolerant and live in peace with one another whatever their religion might be, but the problem is that fanatics have a louder voice than the silent majority.

4.4 Civil Society

The lack of secular civil society organizations that take the lead in creating environment for dialogue and social exposure between different religious groups is a basic failure of the civil society in Egypt. This phenomenon was stemming mainly from the regime's policies that did not grant permissions to any secular organization desiring to work in that sensitive area: tensions between religious groups. On the other hand, empowering the radical groups in Egypt by allowing their funding from Gulf countries, while appearing to fight them in public is a harmful policy that shows how the old regime was only attempting to keep its power. In doing so, the government was essentially leaving the entire field of civil society to radical religious groups.

Chapter 5: Policies Affecting Religious Tolerance in Egypt: Recommendations

Egypt can benefit from other countries' experiences as well as from its own history in combating religious intolerance by implementing different policies that aims at integrating Muslims and Christians and creating more opportunities for dialogue.

One good example is that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a study has found out that civic-integrated institutions such as schools help in the integration process by fostering collaboration between different ethnicities or religions. A result coming out from a survey of an integrated school of Muslim and Catholic students has shown that students in this integrated school were willing to contribute financially to a public good three times more than those of a non-integrated school. The study indicates that more collaboration is achieved by a higher level of social exposure between different religious groups (Dizikies 2011). Thus, I recommend not granting more permissions by the government to the so-called Islamic schools since these schools promote segregation. I also recommend continuing to teach different religions at school, but with an emphasis on the values of diversity and tolerance, and also allowing students to take cross-classes between different religion classes and presenting different religions to all students. In this light, teaching religions at school would contribute to removing any misconceptions children could develop in an early age about different religions and believers of different religions.

Bidwai (2006) examined the exclusion of Muslims in governmental jobs in India and how Muslims were underrepresented even in their local communities and pointed out at mainly two goals to combat discrimination against Muslims in India: ending exclusion and promoting empowerment. These goals could be achieved through strong affirmative actions that would appoint Muslims in sensitive positions in military, police, and intelligence. Bidawi also warned

that "without bold action, the project of combating anti-Muslim discrimination won't get anywhere." I share his opinion about Christians in Egypt and that they have to be appointed in sensitive positions in the government since this is one of the major areas where they are discriminated against and I also recommend adding university high positions and high-ranked judges to these domains (Bishry 2010).

Also to foster dialogue and social exposure between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, funds have to be given to civil society to promote the culture of dialogue and design programs which bring Muslim and Christians together whether they are programs by age, profession, gender, or any other categorization. Also a large institution supported by the state should be in charge of supporting, encouraging, and building capacities for civil organizations interested in foster dialogue between Muslims and Christians. In Spain, the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence has been established to offer funds to different religious and minority organizations that promote dialogue and religious freedom since there were claims by non-Catholic groups that there are policies and restrictions at the local level that prevent them from assembling to freely practice their religions (International Religious Freedom Report 2007).

In Catalonia, a special prosecutor was appointed for hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims, Jews and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals (International Religious Freedom Report 2007). I find this idea very important to be implemented in Egypt so that those victims of hate crimes would not feel lonely and would be able to fight for their rights through legal channels instead of resorting to violence. Censorship should also be limited so that everyone can express their art and thoughts freely, in order to have a sane and healthy society that understands and appreciates diversity.

Perhaps more importantly, El-Azhar's independence from the state has to be retained and its financial resources have to be returned just like the churches. El-Azhar, traditionally and historically is the largest and the most renowned Islamic institution in the world where students from all over the world come to study Islam and then become preachers and scholars in their countries. It is a well-known fact than non-independent organizations cannot really contribute to the development of the world. El-Azhar has to retain its independence, so that it can lead again and present the tolerant face of Islam in front of the radical Islamist groups that emerged only because of the deterioration of El-Azhar's role.

The media outlet in Egypt has to gain its independence from the formal regime and censorship on freedom of expression has to be lifted. Every person should be given fair chance to present his/her opinions.

A unified law that governs religious institutions has to be adopted. In that way, no group would claim that the other have more rights. Fewer tensions would arise if equal rights were given to everyone regardless of their religion. Churches should be built as easy as mosques and mosques should be able to have financial independence like churches. There should not be different laws for different religions. And followers of other religions than Islam, Christianity, or Judaism should also be given the same rights.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Religious tolerance is a highly significant issue in multi-religion countries. Religious conflicts can hinder economic development in the country through causing instability in the economy. They can also represent a major obstacle to the nation building process, particularly, in nationalist experiments promoting secular agendas. Such secular agenda is arguably unavoidable in countries with more than one significant religious group. If the nationalist experiment fails to integrate all religious groups in the same social texture, and if religious intolerance remains dominant, the nationalist experiment can come to a halt. Religious conflicts can also be motivated by persistent economic inequalities between religious groups. Combating this inequality could be in itself a major goal of the economic policy.

This thesis examined the current public policies affecting religious tolerance in Egypt, one of the largest multi-religion Middle Eastern countries. The public policies examined involved the most influential actors: the Egyptian government, the media (both official and private), the formal religious institutions (Muslim and Christian), and the civil society. It provided an assessment and evaluation of the relative success of these policies, as well as a recommendation for a set of public policies aiming at raising religious tolerance, touching on the international experiences of other countries.

The main theme of the recommended policies is to lighten the state's heavy intervention in the media, the formal religious institutions, and the civil society organizations: the other actors that influence religious tolerance in the country. This state intervention was a common practice of the secular nationalist experiment in Egypt under Nasser (1952-70). This practice remained in effect even under the "supposedly" liberal policies of Sadat and Mubarak. While the purpose of state

intervention was to enforce a secular and tolerant attitude that is in line with the state's secular policies, in practice, it led to opposite effects. The media, formal religious institutions, and civil organizations increasingly lost their credibility and influence on the public. This vacuum was filled in by more radical, yet less corrupt and independent religious rhetoric. El-Azhar, the major Islamic institution in Egypt for centuries, and that kept its independence throughout its history, was turned into a governmental department. The mosques that fell under the supervision of the Ministry of *Waqfs* became less credible and less attractive to the Muslim masses that resorted to civil mosques, that were independent of the state, and that were controlled by Salafis and Muslim Brotherhood. The public also shifted from the secular state-controlled media to the independent private media that employed much more conservative and radical rhetoric. It is my main recommendation in this thesis to lighten the state's heavy hand over religious institutions and media.

Education remains the best way to combat religious intolerance. Egypt has one of the highest illiteracy rates, with official illiteracy rate of 34% (UNICEF 2010). In order to combat intolerance, people should have the ability to choose for themselves and have a mind on their own or else they will be easily oppressed and manipulated since they are not free-minded.

In this context, the 2011 revolution that managed to oust Mubarak represents both a chance and a threat. On one hand, it represents a golden historical chance to redefine the secular nationalist program in new terms that would allow a certain level of independence for formal religious institutions and the media, in order to regain credibility of the moderate rhetoric of religion. On the other hand, it may represent a threat to the secular nationalist program itself if the more credible Islamist forces that gained legitimacy and popularity after the revolution manage to

change the nature of the state. Which one of these two scenarios is going to happen is still unclear.

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