MARGUIRGUIS OF EVERYONE:

A SECULARIZED COPTIC ORTHODOX

PHILANTHROPY

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Abstract:

During the 19th century, the relation between the Egyptian ruling system and the Coptic Christian community has witnessed a remarkable shift, which has given new meanings to the Coptic mode of giving. For centuries, the former was predominantly dependent on the Coptic clerical order to fulfill the needs of its poor congregants. Because of this alliance, which is known as the millet-system, the Coptic Patriarchate was able to form a central ecclesial government of care. In my thesis, I argue that amid modernization processes, the Egyptian state tended to decentralize this government and to secularize the millet-system. It allied with Coptic laymen to move the practice of Coptic charity to spaces that do not belong to the benevolent services offered by the Church hierarchy. As a result of this move, the practice of Coptic philanthropy has become conducted through small fragmented religious networks. Instead of being attached to the Coptic Patriarchate, the lives of the recipients and the donors of Coptic charity have turned out to be entangled with state secular laws and to be idioms of wider national discourses.

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Introduction

For the first time, I recognized that they are different, despite of the correspondence of their activities. In January 2015, while I was in Cairo, I visited *Gam'eyet Al-Shahid Al-'Azim Marguirguis al-Qibtiyya al-Orthozoxiyya lel khadamat il-khayriyya* (The Great Martyr Marguirguis Coptic Orthodox Society for the charitable services), which assist around 80 Coptic Christian women. I knew this Society since my childhood, as one of my cousins has been working for it for more than 25 years. At the Society, while I was having tea with my cousin and with Nadia, the gatekeeper of the Society, the latter said, "you know Mina, since your cousin have started to serve poor people in St. Mark [Coptic Orthodox] Church [two years ago], she became so busy. Now, I rarely find her working here in the Society. St. Mark took her from Marguirguis." The words of Nadia have distinguished between two Coptic philanthropic spaces. For the Coptic Christians, Marguirguis, or St. George the Romanian, is known as *Amir il-Shohda'* (The Prince of the Martyrs). Many Coptic Orthodox Churches carry his name. However, through my period of fieldwork[1], I have noticed that Marguirguis of the Society could be differentiated from all the Churches including the one of St. Mark. The charity work offered by the Marguirguis Society is similar to but not the same as the benevolent services offered by the Coptic Church hierarchy, which are administrated by its clergymen.[2]

[1] My fieldwork extended for three weeks between the 14th of April and the 4th of May 2015.

[2] In Egypt, the word 'Copts' refers to the Christian minority in general. A Coptic Church might be Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant. However, because the focus of the thesis will be mainly on the relation between the Coptic Orthodox charitable Society and the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, I will use the word 'Copt' to describe the Coptic Orthodox Christians, and 'the Coptic Church (or Church with Capital C) as a signifier to the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate and its clerical order. Moreover, hereafter, when I will refer to the Catholic and the Protestant Churches and their congregants, I will mention them by their names (i.e. Catholics & Protestants-Catholic Church & Protestant Church).

In my thesis, I ask how concepts and practices related to a Christian mode of giving have changed in relation to shifting of political regimes and alliances? To respond this inquiry, I will analyze the reasons that have extended the Coptic Christian charitable work to spaces that are not part of the benevolent services provided by the Coptic Orthodox Church Patriarchate. Moreover, I will explore the significance of this extension on the understanding of the structure of a Coptic Philanthropic space on one hand, and on the position of the Copts within the Egyptian society on the other hand.

By the end of the 19th century, Coptic laymen criticized the organizational mechanisms by which the Coptic Patriarchate was distributing donations among the poor Copts. As a result of an alliance with the political ruling regime, they established their own private charitable societies to practice this mode of giving beyond the financial and the administrative control of Coptic clergymen. In continuation of this alliance, since the 1920s till the current days, Coptic charitable work has become carried out in thousands of Societies that are administrated by Coptic laymen and regulated through the Egyptian State Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA hereafter).[3]

In my thesis, I will build on these historical trajectories in an attempt to examine the forces that have decentralized the Coptic philanthropy, in addition to the impacts that have resulted from moving it to spaces that are based upon secular state laws. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the religious, political, and socio-economic rationalities connected to the Coptic mode of giving have differed within these spaces from the ones associated with the Coptic ecclesial government of care. Moreover, I will show how the fragmentation of the latter and the secularization of its charitable activities inside small-scale Coptic benevolent

[3] It is also called the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

outlets have not only allowed the state to intervene into the lives and the practices of the Copts. Furthermore, the latter have also become able to construct new imaginations of their status inside the Egyptian community.

Structure of the Thesis:

Khidmet ikhwet il-rab (serving the brethren, or the siblings, of the Lord), [4] or could simply be called *khidma,* that is how the charitable work conducted within both the Coptic Church and the Coptic Societies is referred to. It embraces two groups of Coptic laymen. Firstly, there are the *khoddam* (the servants), and secondly there are the *makhdomein* (the poor served people).[5]

The first chapter of the thesis will be concerned with the *khoddam* of the Marguirguis charitable Society. I will primarily illustrate the reasons that have motivated the *khoddam* to run a Coptic Christian benevolence outside the 'borders' of the Coptic Patriarchate, and beyond the authority of its clergymen. Afterwards, I will analyze the processes by which the *khoddam* give religious meanings to the space of the Society. These processes, by which Coptic laymen build and defend places for *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* in front of the state, challenge the mainstream narrative that has positioned the Coptic clerical hierarchy at the top of this mission.

In the second chapter, I will explore why the poor Copts, the *makhdomein,* ask for help from the Marguirguis Society, instead of or in addition to the assistance that they get from the Church. In doing so, I will get closer to how the *makhdomein* justify their need to the help of the Society. These narratives are not only associated with criticism directed towards the

[4] A connotation refers to the poor Christian people, and it commonly used in Egypt. It is derived from the bible, (Mathew 25: 35-40).

[5] It is needless to mention that the *khoddam/makhdomein* duality does not carry any class distinctions, where the latter is more privileged than the former. However, on the complete contrary, it manifests a Christian piety, and it is also an assumed form of modesty. A *khadim or khaddam* (singular of *khoddam*), in other words, is always of a higher economic and social status than a makhdom (singular of makhdomein).

inadequacy of the church-based donation system. Moreover, they manifest how the Marguirguis Society and its counterparts, which are legally facilitated by the state, present important outlets for the deprived Copts to overcome the complex marginalization, which they face because of their class and of their religious identity.

The third, final chapter will be a concluding part that will look at the Marguirguis Society in a broader perspective. I will demonstrate how Coptic charitable Societies invite us to think about how they redeem the 'failings' of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. These 'failings' are connected not only to whether the Church fulfill the social and the economic needs of its congregants, of the Coptic *khoddam and the makhdomein*. They are also linked to the Coptic Church spatial boundedness and exclusionary dynamics that have presented the Coptic community as a persecuted minority who should always be protected by their clerical order. Unlike the 'gated-community' of the Church, the fact that Coptic charitable Societies accept Muslims to join its spaces but also to participate in its activities has allowed Copts to integrate into the Egyptian society, and to publically display their religious beliefs.

Historical Background: The First Society and Beyond

The first Coptic Christian Charitable Society was established in January 1881. It was called *Gam'yet il-Masa'y il-khayriyya il-Qibtiyya al-Kubra* (The Great Coptic Society for Benevolent Initiatives) (Tadros 1945:1).[6] Boutros Ghaly, who was the first and the last Coptic Prime Minister of Egypt of 'modern' Egypt, founded this Society together with other Coptic laymen (ibid).[7] The establishment of this Society came after a dispute between these

[6] In 1908, it became known as *il-Gam'eya il-Khayriya il-Qibtiyya* (The Coptic Benevolent Society).
[7] Boutros Ghaly was the Prime Minister of Egypt between 1908 and 1910, before he was assassinated.

laymen and the Coptic Pope, Cyril V,[8] regarding the organization of the *waqf* (Ibrahim 2011: 101).

To begin with, the *waqf* presents the properties, the endowments, (i.e. the orphanages, the schools, and the hospitals, in addition to the churches and the monasteries themselves), which belong to the Church. In 1875, Ghaly and his fellow laymen established what they called *il-Majlis il-Milli* (Lay Council) (Carter 1988:28). This Council was established to share Pope Cyril V the administration of the *waqf.* It was mainly constituted because the Coptic laymen were skeptical about how the services and the collected donations that were attached to the working of the endowments were distributed among the poor Copts. However, few years later, as a result of many tensions between the Council and clergymen, Pope Cyril V greatly lessened the power of the former (Ibrahim 2011:36). The Pope, hence, declared himself the absolute controller of all the Coptic endowments. Accordingly, Ghaly preferred to privatize the charitable work conducted in the *waqf.*

The spatial 'othering' of the Church and of its *waqf* properties after the formation of the private charitable Society did not put an end to the dispute between the Lay Council and the Coptic Patriarchate. Nevertheless, the former attempted to further push for its case. In 1892, Boutros Ghaly sent a petition to the ruler of Egypt, Khedive 'Abbas Hilmi II,[9] asking him to force the Pope to share the controlling over *waqf* properties with the Lay Council (Ibid:119). Moreover, to support this petition, *Gam'yet il-Masa'y il-khayriyya il-Qibtiyya al-Kubra* together with other Coptic private Society called *Gam'yet Al-Tawfiq* organized protests

[8] In Arabic, Cyril is pronounced as Kyrollos. Pope Cyril V papacy lasted for about 52 years (between 1874 and 1927), the longest in the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He is the 112th Pope of Alexandria.
[9] During the period when Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire, 'Khedive' was the title of the Turkish governor of Egypt between 1867 and 1914. 'Abbas Hilmi II was the last to hold this title, as he ruled between 1892 and 1914.

against the Pope and against some of his Bishops (CPSS 1995:248).[10] Because of these protests and of Ghaly's political influence, in September 1892, the Khedive issued a decree that removed Pope Cyril V from his office (Ibrahim 2011:119). It is true that the functioning of this decree lasted for less than 2 years, and that Pope Cyril V resumed his papacy and his absolute management of the *waqf* till his death in 1927. However, the political alliance that occurred between the khedive and the stakeholders of the first private charitable Society has its trajectory towards the understanding of the contemporary Societies including the one of Marguirguis.

The current charitable Societies including the one of Marguirguis are also administrated by Coptic laymen. However, these laymen do not present an elitist social class, as it was the case with Boutros Ghaly and his associates. Nevertheless, as will be argued in chapter I, they are just members of the Coptic congregation who have preferred to practice *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* independently of the benevolent services offered by the Church ecclesial government. Because they are critical of the latter, they have made use of the legal opportunities, which have been provided to all the Egyptian citizens since 1923 to voluntarily establish Non-Governmental Organizations/Societies of their own interests (El-Ghoneimy 2003:201). Different from the circumstances that surrounded the first Society, these laymen have intended neither to take over the Church properties, nor to have struggles with clergymen. The purpose of their legal alliance with the state, instead, has been to open new spaces in which the Coptic Orthodox mode of giving could be detached from the *waqf*. Since laymen have become much less concerned about 'reforming' the *waqf* from inside, as was the case with the founders of the first Society, Charitable Societies have turned out to be a sovereign basis that produces its own meanings of Coptic philanthropy.

[10] *Gam'yet Al-Tawfiq* (the Good Fortune Society) was established in 1891. It supported the Lay Council in its opposition to the Pope.

In my thesis, I am interested in investigating the meanings of the charitable 'gifts' distributed inside these Societies, and of how these meanings are distinctive from the Church benevolent services. Consequently, I will reflect on the different political and economic considerations and values that shape the relation between the donor and the receiver of Coptic philanthropy. Moreover, because these societies are administrated by state secular laws, I will argue that becoming among the Coptic *khoddam* and *makhdomein* has turned out to embrace obligations that are attached to wider national discourses and interests.

Methodological Framework: Becoming a Member of the Marguirguis Society

It is very important to firstly illustrate that the change of the identity of the Coptic charitable Societies since the 1923 constitution to entities regulated by the secular laws of the Egyptian government did not eradicate their primary 'private' status that labeled Boutros Ghaly's Society. The main difference, which emphasizes the connection of these Societies to the Egyptian government, is embedded in the presence of inspectors, who are annually or half-annually sent by MOSA to the Societies to check their accounting books. Besides this modification, similar to all the administrators of the Marguirguis Society, I had the feeling that I completely own this place throughout my fieldwork work. I had the keys of all its doors and drawers, and I was able to go there and to look at its documents during anytime of the day.

In her famous ethnography, *Veiled Sentiments*, Lila Abu-Lughod emphasizes how her father facilitated her access to and her personal interactions with the Bedouin society of *Awlad 'Ali*. She writes, "[B]y accompanying me, my father had shown those with whom I would be living…that I was a daughter of a good family…(1986:14)." Similarly, my access to the Marguirguis Society was unconditionally and primarily facilitated because of my cousin, Mrs. Mariam Raouf. I did not have any problem to automatically become one of its *khoddam.*

Moreover, I had excellent opportunities to conduct unstructured interviews with the *makhdomein,* who told me about their anecdotes without any uncertainties. However, when I visited other Coptic charitable Societies in the same neighborhood, I found difficulties in asking question about them and about their activities, regardless of my Christian Orthodox background.

Hence, through out my fieldwork I realized that becoming a member of a Society like the one of Marguirguis mainly depends on social relations and networks that might be resulted from, but not necessarily associated with, an individual's religious affiliations. For example, from the archives of the Society, I recognized that Fawzy Armanyos, the Coptic layman, who established the Marguirguis Society in 1950, appointed a Muslim woman called Fatma as the first secretary of the Society. As previously illustrated, all the laws that have been regulating the working of the Coptic charitable Societies since the 1923 constitution have been secular ones. This means that in official, legal terms, any Egyptian citizen could be a member of any Society despite of his/her religious beliefs. Nevertheless, because of its name and of the religious practices and rituals that give essence to a Coptic Orthodox mode of giving, the Marguirguis Society and its counterparts have mostly been the destination of Coptic Orthodox Christians. This does not mean that there are not contemporary exceptions to this informal, non-written rule that could be added to the historical example of Fatma. On the contrary, during my fieldwork, I have witnessed other few exceptions to which I have paid attention. These exceptions are fundamentally important for my argument in the third chapter, about how Marguirguis could be an interconfessional name, instead of only being a Coptic Orthodox Saint.

The membership of the Marguirguis Society can be divided into 4 categories. To begin with, there is the Board of Trustees. Tharwat, Maher and ʻAtef, who are the President, the Vice President and the Treasurer respectively, are the only ones from the 9 members of the Board of Trustees, whom I met and talked with. The members of the Board of Trustees, who are all volunteers, are elected every 6 years by and from the General Assembly members. The latter are those who regularly pay donations to the Society on monthly, annual, or half-annual basis. It should be noted that the members of both the General Assembly and the Board of Trustees are mostly cousins and/or friends. They informally exchange the membership of the Board of Trustees, depending on who would be able to regularly revise the finances of the Society, and to legally be responsible in front of the governmental inspectors during every electoral cycle.

The third category of the membership of the Society is composed of the employees, who are chosen by the Board of Trustees. Although they are members of the General Assembly as well, the employees cannot join the Board of Trustees. This is because, in official terms, they are not volunteers, but they are monthly paid by the government. While the salaries of the employees do not exceed 200 Egyptian Pounds per month (20 Euros), and that the latter donate them to *ikhwet il-rab,* this very small amount reflects the dual identity of the participants of the Coptic philanthropy within the Marguirguis Society. In other words, Mariam, Nadia, and Ne'ma, who are the only three employees in the Society, are not only *khoddam,* but they are also considered as workers who belong to the Egyptian labor force. This latter labeling points out to the fine line that exists between the *religious* and the *secular* within the Society. It refers to the new considerations based on which 'religious, spiritual' connotations are attributed, which has resulted from the extension of Coptic philanthropy beyond the Church. These kinds of contingencies, which I have noticed during my

conversations with the employees but also with the members of the Board of Trustees, will be emphasized in the first chapter of the thesis, where I will investigate the essence of *khidma* in the Marguirguis Society.

If the members of the Board of Trustees and the General Assembly, in addition to the employees do all belong to the religious category of the *khoddam,* the fourth last category is for the *makhdomein*, the poor served women. The stories of these women, to whom the second chapter will totally be devoted, are literally the reason of this thesis and of its argument. Safa', 'Afaf and Dalal, Soad, are some of the women, who complained about *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* that is organized by the Church hierarchy. Because 'Marguirguis of the Church' is not suitable for them and for their expectations on one hand, because they do not want to give up their faith in 'Marguirguis' on the other hand, they have joined but also founded, 'Marguirguis of the Society.'

Consequently, in my thesis, I will explore this complex interplay that exists between 'Marguirguis of the Church' and 'Marguirguis of the Society.' I will argue that the latter does not only mean that the Coptic *khoddam* and *makhdomein* practice Christian charity beyond the control of their clerical order, and through the regulation of the state. Different from 'Marguirguis of the Church' that has offered a weak, marginalized image of the Copts, I will also prove that 'Marguirguis of the Society' has empowered Copts, and has enabled them to turn the Coptic mode of giving into a representation of their equality.

Chapter I. The Friday of Khidma: To be a Founder of Coptic Philanthropy

1.1. We Should not Leave Him

It is the 17th of April, the Morning of the first Friday after the Eastern Easter that is celebrated by the Coptic Orthodox Church. My cousin told me that we should arrive to the Marguirguis charitable Society before 12:30 p.m., before the Muslim Friday Prayer ends, and the streets get crowded. Before we left, my father wished me luck in my research, and reminded me to pray for him in the Society, particularly in front of the photo of Marguirguis.

Because it is the weekend, fortunately, there is no heavy traffic in the roads of the Cairene neighborhood of Shubra.[11] It took me less than 10 minutes by car to reach the Society from our home. The Marguirguis Society has two apartments that are located in opposite buildings in the Barrad Street in Shubra. The new apartment was bought two years ago, and I will get to its story later in this chapter. Nevertheless, the destination on this Friday was the older place that has carried the name of the Society since its establishment in 1950. We arrived around noon. I spent more than 15 minutes to park my car in the narrow Barrad Street. Abo-Ayman, a Muslim man, who is informally responsible for parking the vehicles in this Street, helped me out. "This is better, you are lucky to put your car in this place…your car is in a safe place now, where the Police cannot fine you (since the Society is next to a police station so there are places in which parking is totally prohibited)… *Ento nas Baraka w Marguirguis baraket el share' kollo* (you are blessed people, and Marguirguis is the blessing of this street as whole," he said.

[11] Shubra is located in the North of Cairo, Egypt. Its name is derived from the Coptic word *Šopro*, which is literally translated into village or field. It was primarily a rural area before it was urbanized during the mid of the 19th century. Currently, Shubra is one of the most populated districts in Cairo, if not whole Egypt, with more than 5 million inhabitants. What is interesting about Shubra is that around half of its inhabitants are Christians. It is hard to find such huge percentage at other neighborhoods.

It is not safe to get to the second floor of the old building of the 17A Barrad Street because some of its stairs are broken, and the stairway is totally dark. "This is dangerous," I told my cousin. "*Marguirguis yestsarraf* (Marguirguis will find a way)" she immediately responded, and then added, "we called an electrician, and he might come tomorrow evening…he is the son of one of *ikhwet il-rab…h*e said that he would fix the electricity of the whole building as a *khidma* for Marguirguis." Fixing the electricity as a *khidma* does not necessarily mean that the electrician would do it for free. However, it means that he might get half of what he normally acquires, and that he would 'honestly' perform his job.

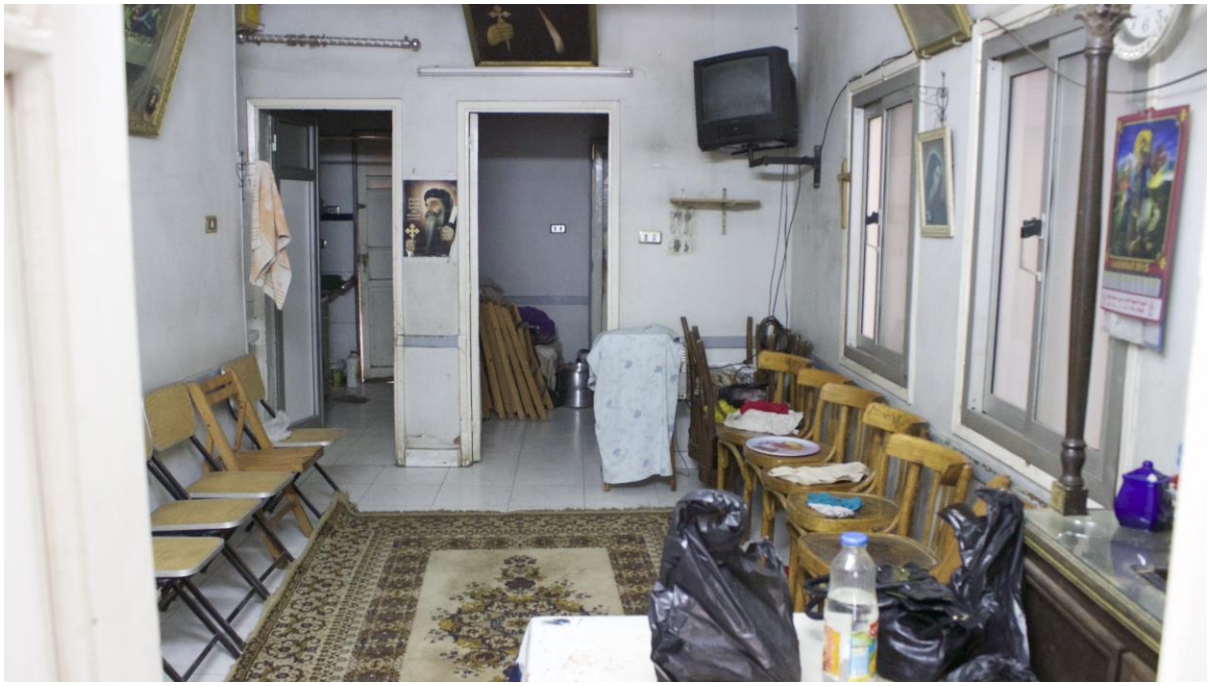

Figure 1. The Old Place of the Marguirguis Society (Photo by Mina Ibrahim)

The door of the Society was slightly opened. As it is the case every Friday, Nadia was alone preparing the breakfast. Based on the Coptic Orthodox calendar, we are currently in the *khamasein* period. These are the fifty celebrating days that follow the Easter. Thus, there is no fasting on this Friday.[12] The breakfast is not vegan. It is composed of eggs, cheese and

[12] According to the Coptic Orthodox doctrine, Copts have to fast (to be vegan) during all the Fridays and the Wednesdays of the year, except during the *khamasein* period. This is because, according to the New Testament, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was on Friday. Moreover, Wednesday was the day on which Judas Iscariot, Jesus' disciple, betrayed him to the Jewish Sanhedrin.

butter, instead of beans, fries and falafel.[13] As I mentioned before, Nadia is the gatekeeper of the Society. She has been working for it for more than 40 years. Currently, she is 59 years old. Thus, according to the Egyptian labor law, she will reach the official retiring age by the beginning of 2016. Previously Nadia used to live in a village in Northern Egypt with her family:

Mina: Aunt Nadia, would you continue working for the Society after you get retired next year?

Nadia: *Akiid!* (Sure!), I do not know any other place but here. I am here since 1974 or 1975. I owe this place and his owner (that is Marguirguis) a lot. Before I got married, I used to come and sleep here …this is my second home…you can even say my first…Marguirguis did a lot to me and to everyone *beykhdemo* (serving him) here. *Da beta'na kolena* (Marguirguis is ours). We should not leave him.

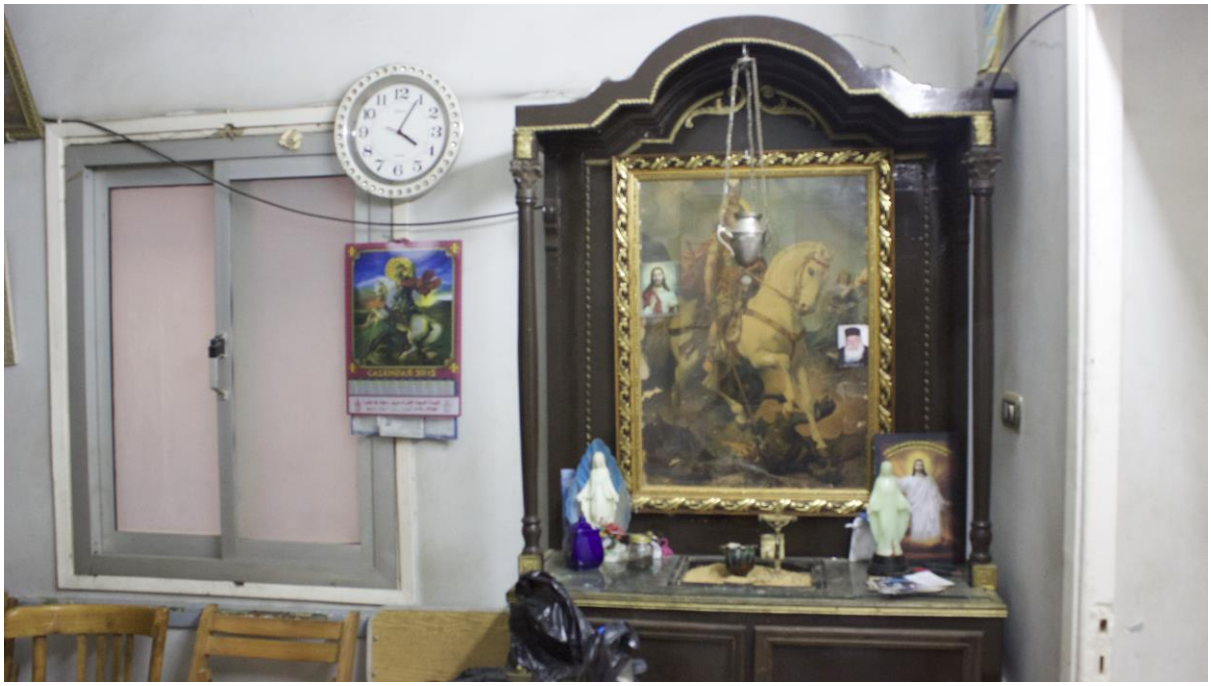

Figure 2. The Marguirguis icon inside the Old Place (Photo by Mina Ibrahim)

The old wooden table, on which Nadia is preparing the breakfast, is in front of a large icon that depicts Marguirguis with two candles lit before it. The pictures of Coptic Orthodox

[13] Spiced mashed chickpeas.

Saints occupy all the corners of the 90 m^2 of the Society including the small kitchen and the half-meter, dusty balcony. According to Nadia, "these photos give blessing to the place.... I feel that I am sitting inside a church while they are surrounding me."

Nadia's objects of blessing that constitutes *her* 'church' are overlapped with and interrelated to governmental dynamics. In other words, based on the fourth article of law no. 84 of the year 2002 (law 84/2002 hereafter), which currently regulates the non-governmental Societies and Organizations, the icons of the Marguirguis Society are considered as *'ohda* (trust funds). This means that, like the chairs and the tables, they are furniture, "movable properties" that are part of the "capital allocated to the Organization." Hence, they have to be officially documented in one of the accounting books presented to the governmental inspectors. Moreover, in case of the "dissolution of the Society" by the government, this "capital" would be put under the control of the Egyptian MOSA together with the space of the Society as whole. "But what could lead to the dissolution of the Society?" This was my questions to 'Atef, the Treasurer of the Society, who arrived few minutes after my short conversation with Nadia.

The answers that 'Atef will give to this question and before him Nadia will construct the basic argument of this chapter. These answers will lay grounds for illustrating the historical political alliance between Coptic laymen and the Egyptian State. As will be showed throughout the chapter, such alliance, which has extended the practice of the Coptic benevolence to spaces that operate beyond the control of the Coptic Patriarchate and through secular laws, has given new meanings to how Coptic philanthropic spaces are built and defended.

1.2. Protecting the Space against Failure

Nadia's words that "we should not all leave him" do not only reflect her personal relation with the Society. Moreover, "leaving him," leaving Marguiguis could also be one of the reasons that might lead to the dissolution of the Society. According to law 84/2002, "if it has been revealed to the founder(s) that the Society/Organization has no longer been able to achieve its purposes, a resolution may be issued in an extraordinary meeting for the dissolution of the Society/Organization."[14] Officially, "the founders" within this legal context refer to the members of the board of trustees. Nevertheless, practically, Nadia's presence is very important for achieving "the purposes" of the Society as well. For example, she is the one who is primarily responsible for preparing the food baskets that are distributed among for the *makhdomein* at the Christmas, at the Easter, or at any other Coptic Christian event. Furthermore, besides the regular donations paid by the General Assembly members, there are other people who occasionally call the Society, and express their interests in donating money or food. Because she is the only one who go to the Society 6 days per week from 9 a.m. till 4 p.m., Nadia usually gets these calls, and collects the money from the houses of these irregular donators. Consequently, continuing to be in and not to leave the Society is not only important for Nadia, who in less than a year, will not have any legal, official obligations to continue working for the Society. However, Nadia's connection with the Society, which embraces other non-financial aspects, is also important for the perpetuation of the *khidmet ikhwet il-rab.*

After he came to the Society, 'Atef expressed another, more technical and serious reason because of which the Society might be dissolved. However, this time, the dissolution would

[14] Article no. 30 of law 84/2002.

not be a voluntary decision made by the founders of the Society, but through an arbitrary one taken by the government.

Before coming to the Society, ‘Atef was attending a Holy Mass at the Church of Virgin Mary & Archangel Michael Orthodox Church in *‘Ayyad Beik* Street, which is also located in Shubra. Besides being a main deacon there, ‘Atef was previously part of *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* that is administrated by this Church. To begin with, inside the Church, the *khoddam* are allowed to serve in *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* because of the hierarchical clerical chain that sequentially embraces the Pope, the Bishops and the Priests. Moreover, through this chain as well, each *khadim* (singular of *khoddam*) get his/her instructions of how to practice *khidma*, and of how to collect and to distribute donations among *ikhwet il-rab*. However, although still devoted to the Church and to its clergymen, ‘Atef left the *khidma* of the Church because he was not able to “*ash’or b-keimet* (feel the value) of the *khidma”* there. According to him, *“*it is too crowded in the Church…the number of the *makhdomein* are much more than the one of the *khoddam…*the *khoddam* [hence] are not able to understand the problems of and to build close relations with their *makhdomein*.” On the contrary, *khidma* in the Society is for ‘Atef much more *“‘ahda w ‘aryah* (calm and comforting).”

It is true that Atef’s feeling of the “value of *khidma”* inside the Society has allowed him to collect and to distribute the donations among *ikhwet il-rab* beyond the central regulations of the Church hierarchical order. Nevertheless, this “value” has become intertwined with a form of economy that links the charitable donations of the Marguirguis Society to state regulations. Put differently, the ‘calmness’ that ‘Atef admires in the Society could be ‘disturbed’ by the governmental inspectors of MOSA. Again, law 84/2002 gives the right to the government to freeze the activities of and to dissolve any non-governmental Organization/Society, if its financial accounts include calculating errors, if they are not complete, or if it has proven that

they are forged. As the Treasurer of the Society, therefore, ‘Atef was worried about whether or not the accounting books would be ready at the time when the governmental inspectors would visit the Marguiguis Society. He expressed his anxiety through a phone call to Ne’ma, who is Nadia’s daughter, and who has been employed in the Society by the end of 2014 to be the third employee together with Nadia and Mariam:

> Ne’ma, you know that you are a member of the Society with us, right? Why the accounting book number 29 is not ready till now? I told you before about it several times… Listen, to come to the Society for just two days every week is not acceptable…You should come to the Society four days every at least...your Mother, Mrs. Mariam, and I are now old [they are all about to reach 60 in one or two years]…by now, you should be responsible for many tasks because you are young… this place should remain after us…it should remain serving people and serving Marguirguis…it will not be closed whatever the reason would be.

‘Atef’s fear from the closure of the Society did not stop at his call with Ne’ma. For more than three hours, we kept filling the accounting books and stamping them with the official governmental seal (known as *khitm il-nisr*). In addition to our prayer in front of the icon of Marguirguis, we were using calculators to revise the numerical entries of the two months, March and April. ‘Atef told us, *“khally balko ay ghalat hanroh f dahya* (take care, we would be ruined if anything would appear to be wrong.” ‘Atef’s concerns about the writing of the books is connected to Web Keane (1997) and Schieffelin (1996), who have emphasized the significance of analyzing the performative aspects of any ritual, and of how these aspects are important for understanding rituals as contingent “social events, which may well succeed or fail in [their] own terms” (Coleman 2013: 297).

Within similar context, Catherine Bell (1992) has argued about the “ritualization” process through which actions are “ritualized” to have a specific efficacy and to fulfill certain purposes (ix). By looking at the internal dynamics of the ritualization process, Bell mentioned, the origins of a ritual could accurately be determined, and its current shape could strategically be associated with the historical practices that contributed to its emergence. As

will be later illustrated in the second chapter of the thesis, every Sunday witnesses the main weekly event of the Marguirguis Society in which the *khoddam* pray and read the Bible with the *makhdomein,* and after which money or food is distributed to the latter. However, before Sunday comes with its prayers that spiritualize its charitable donations, there are the practices of the Friday of *khidma*, namely the writing of the accounts, for which ‘Atef wants to build a second generation from people such as Ne’ma. These practices, which present an essential declaration of following the secular law 84/2002, is a crucial element for a *ritualization process* that would construct *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* in the name of Marguirguis within the Society. To put it simply, hence, to serve Marguirguis, ‘Atef has to equally ‘serve’ the legal system of the Egyptian government.

1.3. The Church & the Society

“The only difference between the Society and the Church is *il-morakaba* (the governmental inspection)…in the Church there is no censoring by any means,” said Maher, the Vice President of the Marguirguis Society. Similar to ‘Atef, Maher is not detached from the Church. Before coming to the Society, he arrived his grandchildren to the Sunday school at St. Mark church in Shubra. However, with respect to *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* in particular, Maher prefers to be a member of the Marguirguis Society because inside it he is able to freely manage the *khidma* without being constrained by the decisions and the orders of clergymen. According to him, “we all know each other…Nadia is my cousin…‘Atef is my close friend…we understand each other…each one can do whatever he wants and the rest will support him…there is no priest to tell you this is wrong and this is right.” Maher’s interest to practice *khidma* among a kinship network that is composed of his friends and cousins, and beyond the rules of clergymen, has enabled him to propose the idea of buying a new bigger apartment for the Society in January 2013. This has mainly been due to the increasing number of *makhdomein.*

About the story of this apartment, Maher mentioned, "we had hard time with the owner of the building…we were happy that he finally accepted to sell the apartment for less than ½ of its original price as a gift to Marguirguis…[But] *lel 'asaf* (unfortunately) we had to put the name of "[Marguirguis] Society" on the official contract as the owner of the apartment instead of us (instead of one the members of the Board of Trustees or of the General Assembly)." Consequently, the fact that the 'owner' of the new apartment should be the "Marguirguis Society" has constructed Maher's "only difference" between the Society and the Church. It is true that the money, by which the apartment was bought, was collected from the members of the Marguirguis Society, from his friends and cousins. However, the new apartment has to firstly be registered as a non-governmental charitable Society that is affiliated to MOSA to legally begin *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* within it. Linking the name of "Marguirguis" to the secular procedures and regulations of the Egyptian government has turned out to *guarantee* the rise of a space of *khidma*. Even if he does not want it, Maher is aware that the 'legalization' of the new apartment is an essential mean towards a desired end. In other words, taking the name of Marguirguis away from the Church has to be associated with labeling it with a governmental number of publicity. Practicing *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* away from the benevolent services of the Church hierarchy is inevitably prolonged with an endorsement of state laws.

1.4. The Origins of "the Only Difference"

The fact that Maher and the other members of the Marguirguis Society have chosen to be financially censored by the government motivates us to critically think about what could give rise to a Coptic Philanthropy religious ritual beyond the Church. Furthermore, the fact that they have accepted to put money in a property that could be seized by the government invite us to take "faith seriously," as Ruth Marshall says, so as to be able to grasp "the inherent *rationality of its disciplines and practices*, over and above its social, cultural, or political

functions" (2009:3; emphasis added). Marshall's argument, which is an attempt to move beyond the functionalist approach of understanding 'faith,' has been emphasized elsewhere by David Scott and Charles Hirschkind. The latter have argued how "religions cannot be understood as cultural elaborations of a universal form of experience…but must be analyzed in their particularity, *as the products of specific practices of discipline, authority and power"* (2006:7; emphasis added).

In the historical background section, I have mentioned that the first Coptic charitable Society was the *product* of a tension between Coptic laymen and the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate. Furthermore, I have also argued about alliance that the former established with the Khedive against the latter, after the formation of this Society. What I would like to illustrate at this point is that this political alliance did not only result from the critiques given by Coptic laymen to the benevolent services of the Church. Put differently, the "inherent rationality" that has influenced Coptic congregants as Maher and 'Atef to practice *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* in spaces that are regulated by state secular laws should not only be considered as voluntary acts that aim at 'reforming' the Coptic mode of giving. However, this "rationality" has resulted from historical structural transformations, through which the Egyptian ruling system has intended to increase its influence over the religious practices of the Copts, and to be further politically and economically involved into the dynamics of these practices. As will be illustrated below, investigating these transformations will significantly define why, after it has been centralized by the clerical order of the Coptic Patriarchate, the mission of founding Coptic philanthropic spaces has moved to be scattered among small kinship networks of Coptic laymen, as it is the case inside the Marguirguis Society.

To accurately trace these transformations, I will primarily refer to the millet (or *millat)* system that had predominantly and absolutely characterized the relation between the Coptic community and their political rulers. To begin with, the millet system refers to the recognition of the religious minorities, or the confessional groups as they were called, as unified communities, whose demands would collectively be presented by their religious authorities (Ibrahim 2011:3). For centuries, the Ottoman rulers employed this system to practice their influence over the non-Muslim groups in the widely stretched provinces of their Empire.

However, since he ruled over it in 1805, Mohamed 'Ali (or Mehmet 'Ali), known as the 'founder of 'modern Egypt' started to detach Egypt from the control of the central Ottoman government of *il-Bab il-'Ali* (the High Port) in Istanbul.[15] As a result of his economic and diplomatic relations with European 'modern' nation-states, 'Ali together with his sons and grandsons who succeeded him, attempted to 'reform' what has become labeled as the 'traditional' political organization of the Ottomans, including the 'modernization' of the millet-system (see Ibrahim 2011 part I- chapter 1). Hence, they tended not only to eliminate the mediation of the Coptic Pope, and to have a direct connection with the members of the Coptic congregation. Moreover, they also issued inclusive policies through which the Copts were integrated into the Egyptian society. Consequently, Coptic laymen were employed as state officials in financial and administrative positions. Moreover, others were assigned to rule over local governorates in Egypt (Ibrahim et al. 1996:11). Consequently, Coptic laymen, who have become politically empowered by this 'modernization' process, intended to shift the representation of the needs and the demands of the Coptic community in general and the poor among them in particular out of the hands of the Pope. Accordingly, they founded the

[15] Mohammed 'Ali was originally an Albanian soldier, a janissary, in the Ottoman Army. At the beginning of the 19th century, he was sent by the Ottoman Sultan to fight against the French in Egypt. After he succeeded, 'Ali started to rule over Egypt.

Lay Council in 1874 followed by the first charitable Society in 1881. The fact that Khedive ‘Abbas Hilmi II, the grandson of Mohamed ‘Ali, allied with the laymen against Pope Cyril V, indicated his support and recognition of this ‘modernized’ form of representation.

The acceptance of this representation has been further institutionalized after the 1923 constitution that marked the beginning of the so-called liberal era. As mentioned before in the historical background section, since this constitution, the Egyptian political system gave opportunities to more Coptic laymen to open new spaces for *khidma* away from the Church clerical order. Consequently, any Coptic layman, who wanted to practice the ritual of giving beyond the control of clergymen, had to first acknowledge the legal regulation of the government. To be sure, this acknowledgment has set the basis of “the only difference” between the Church and the Society that Maher argued about.

One of the most important reasons that have moved the former to revise its relation with the latter, and to begin another form of partnership with the Coptic community through its laymen was the special historical status of the *waqf.* To begin with, it is important to note that not only the charitable Societies have resulted from a political alliance with the state. The *waqf* properties were products of the millet-system, which is itself nothing but a political cooperation between the Egyptian ruling system and Church hierarchy as well. Nevertheless, while this has never been presented through a formal- written law, for centuries, the *waqf* properties were provided special immunity against any form of seizure or control from the side the state after their establishment (Ener 2003:4). Consequently, among his ‘modernization’ procedures, Mohamed ‘Ali attempted to break this immunity, and to create a central institution to administrate the finances of all the *waqf* properties. However, he significantly failed because the Coptic Patriarchate was able to construct this intervention as a

severe form of discrimination committed against the Coptic minority (Clark 2004:9). Moreover, when Khedive 'Abbas Hilmi II exiled Pope Cyril V, and attempted to reorganize the structure of the *waqf* in favor of laymen, massive demonstrations erupted against him. These demonstrations, which condemned the Khedive for 'humiliating' the religious leader of the Copts, could define why the exiling of Pope Cyril V did not last long but also why the popularity of Boutros Ghaly and his associates was drastically affected following this incident.

Consequently, to be able to practice its control over the Coptic citizens, while 'modernizing' and centralizing its ruling, the state has facilitated the establishment of Coptic philanthropic spaces within the framework of what I call a *secularized* millet-system. To begin with, Saba Mahmood (2011) defines secularism not simply as "the doctrinal separation of the church and the state but the reticulation of religion in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance" (836-7). Mahmood's argument, which has also been reflected in her ethnography about a pious movement of Muslim women in Egypt (2005), is derived from Talal Asad's genealogical, Foucauldian approach, by which he tries to analytically understand the historical contingencies that gave rise to the category of 'religion,' and of what seems to be its opposite, namely the 'secular.' In his remarkable book, *The Formations of the Secular*, Asad interprets secularism not to be that inevitable linear process of the modernization process, where "*real* human life gradually emancipates from the controlling power of "religion"" and becomes secular (Asad, 2003:191; emphasis in origin). Nevertheless, secularism should be understood as a project that is enacted upon the world, where the normative standards of the secular and the religious are deliberately "fashioned" through discursive processes of political power relations (Agrama, 2010:499). Within this context, Asad has attempted to denaturalize and to de-essentialize both the 'secular' and the

'religious.' He writes, "The secular…[is not]…an essence that excludes…a sacred origin…[but] a concept that brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life" (2003:25).

Secularizing the millet-system does not only indicate attaching the members of the Coptic community to the administration of the state, and removing the mediation of the Pope as explained above. More important, it means that the state has constructed new secular systems of knowledge through which the Coptic religious ritual of giving has transferred to spaces that function beyond the complicated measurements of the 'traditional' millet-system. Consequently, the secularized millet-system is a project that has been designed to rearticulate the Coptic philanthropy upon innovative principles that were not previously presented with respect to the *waqf* properties.

In other words, since the 1923 constitution, the Egyptian state has begun to institutionalize legal tools for the establishment of Coptic charitable spaces. Currently, there is the secular law 84/2002 because of which the state has secured for itself a consistent legitimate intervention within the financial and the administrative affairs of the Societies. The fact that there are continuous concerns about the accuracy of the accounting books and about the visits of the governmental inspectors from the side of Coptic laymen, who administrate these Societies, demonstrate that the 'religious' practice of *khidma* within the Societies is "fashioned" in a way that would be adequate for a 'modern' centralized "mode of governance," as Saba Mahmood puts it. In more concrete terms, the production of *khidma* within the Societies does not depend on the state just *before* their establishment, as it is the case with the *waqf*. However, there is an *everyday* political linkage with the state that develops the formation of the 'sacred' within secular spaces and by secular practices.

1.5. The Legacy of the two Millet-Systems

It should be emphasized that the rise of the 'secularized' millet-system did not totally substitute the 'traditional' millet-system. The latter has continued to have its trajectory till the very current days. This is especially with respect to the requests made by the Coptic Patriarchate to the Egyptian government to build spaces for *khidma*, namely 'formal' churches. Moreover, it should be noted that, as it has always been the case, such churches have remained to get the special immunity that was historically attained by the *waqf* properties.

In December 2014, Pope Tawadros II, the Coptic Pope number 118, who succeeded Pope Shenouda III since 2012, held a meeting with the representatives of the Catholic and the Protestant Churches. In this meeting, the hierarchies of the three Churches issued a draft for a unified law by which they could get more *waqf* properties. Nevertheless, the Egyptian government did not approve it because, according to Ibrahim Henedy, the Egyptian Minister of Transitional Justice, "the articles of this draft contradict the 2014 Egyptian Constitution that the Egyptians approved it" (Ne'mat-Allah 2014).

This is not the first time for the Egyptian ruling political system to oppose such type of law. Since 1934 till the current days, the establishment of churches has become dependent upon 10 conditions that are impossible to fulfill (CPSS 1999:92). One of these arbitrary conditions, for instance, stresses that the Coptic Patriarchate should get the approval of the Muslims who inhabit the area on which it would attempt to build the church. Moreover, the building of the church should be conducted far from mosques and/or shrines of Muslim saints (ibid). Furthermore, in addition these written conditions, practically, accepting or refusing the building of a single church has usually been a decision made on a case-by-case by the

political ruler himself (Nikolov 2008:19). This has been specifically after the 1952 movement that has overthrown the Monarchy, and that has marked the beginning of the republican era. Consequently, the rejection of the recent draft marked a new episode of the sustainable 'failure' of the representatives of the 3 Churches in general, and of the Coptic Church in particular, to issue a facilitating law that could give them more authority to build spaces for *khidmet ikhwet il-rab*.

One of the articles of the 2014 rejected draft stated that the maximum distance between two Churches that belong to the same dominion should not exceed 2 kilometers. Furthermore, another article argued about the possibility of converting private houses that belong to Christian people into registered, licensed churches. The other 3 articles requested the quickening of the bureaucratic procedures that would determine whether or not the demand of building a church would be authorized, and that in case of the rejection of one of the demands, the heads of the Christian dominions would have the right to appeal against such decision (Fares 2014).

Restraining the official legalization of these articles hints at recognizing the significance of the new place of the Marguirguis Society that I have earlier mentioned in this chapter. Based on a secular law (i.e. law 84/2002), the administrators of the Marguirguis Society bought and registered the new apartment, which does not only carry the same name of the Society (i.e. Marguirguis Coptic Orthodox Society). It is also located less than 10 meters away from the old Society. Consequently, the everyday linkage that politically connects the Society with the state has facilitated their establishment. Unlike the 'traditional' millet-system and its *waqf* properties, the presence of a secular component within the Societies, which would guarantee the state to constantly intervene into their affairs, has turned out to compose more spaces for

the practice of the 'religious' ritual of giving. Therefore, the secularization of the millet-system has situated the Coptic laymen in a position through which they could be more efficient than the Coptic Patriarchate with respect to the establishment of outlets for *khidmet ikhwet il-rab*. These spaces, however, has to be constantly defended. In other words, the administrators of the Marguirguis Society have to always demonstrate that they are 'good' citizens, who abide by state laws, together with displaying their spiritual intentions to serve Marguirguis.

1.6. Marguirguis of Everyone (A Conclusion)

Figure 3. In front of the Honorary Board during the Opening Ceremony of the New Marguirguis Society (Photo by Iman Tharwat)

During the opening ceremony of the new Marguirguis Society that was held on the 12th of April 2013, Tharwat, the President of the Marguirguis Society Board of Trustees, invited his father of confession, Father Misa'il. Tharwat prepared an honorary board with a curtain in front of it for the priest to pull. The board refers to the Biblical verse, "Unless the Lord builds

the house, the builders labor in vain."[16] Moreover, it writes, "On Friday the 5th of Bermoda 1729 Martyrs[17] that accords the 12th of April 2013 A.D., and in the era of Pope Tawadros II, the new Marguirguis Society was opened." The honorary board symbolizes something ironic that significantly summarizes the legacy of the secularized millet-system. It demonstrates that name of Marguirguis has turned out to be *of everyone.* The board was brought by Tharwat (a layman), had the name of the Pope, and, as any fixed asset, had to be written within the governmental accounting books.

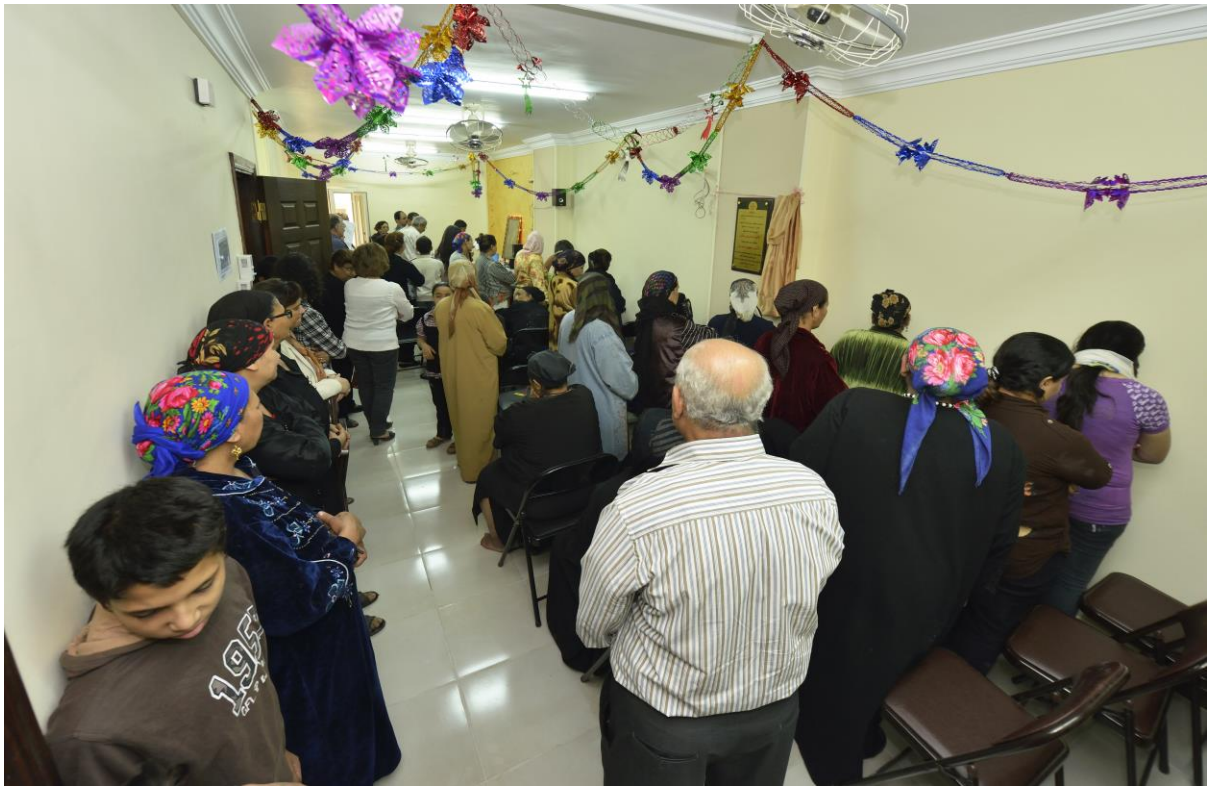

Figure 4. The Opening Ceremony of the New Marguirguis Society (Photo by Iman Tharwat)

In his article, "Secularism, Sovereignty, Intermediacy: Is Egypt a Secular or a Religious State?" Hussein Ali Agrama (2010) argues that the modern project of secularism is not about

[16] The Book of Psalms 127:1.
[17] This is the Coptic Calendar. Previously, the Pharaohs were depending on it for their agricultural seasons. However, the Copts started to calculate the years of their calendar since 284 A.D., when Diocletian became the Emperor of Rome, and started to commit mass executions against Christians. That is why the calendar is named after the martyrs.

that simple differentiation between politics and religion. Nevertheless, it is "*ongoing, deepening, entanglement in the* ***question*** *of religion and politics*" (502; emphasis in original). Agrama is interested in researching the Egyptian legal system. For him, the Egyptian state has always intended to keep *a* line that differentiates between, firstly, the 'religious' codes of the Islamic *shari'a* law and, secondly, the 'secular' codes of the liberal law. This line, by which two sets of legal codes operate under the same legal system, is fundamental for the Egyptian state to both legally intervene into "the religious life and sensibility" on one hand, and to declare its belonging to the camp of the modern, sovereign nation-states on the other hand (ibid).

Similarly, amid the secularization of the millet-system, the Egyptian state did not restrict the Copts to establish spaces for the practice of benevolence. On the contrary, it has further legally facilitated the production of 'religious' Christian rituals in a country of a Muslim majority. However, the production of this 'religious' has been carried out in the form of liberal rights provided to the individual members of the Egyptian population who belong to the Coptic community, and not as recognition of the Coptic community as whole through a representation by its hierarchical order. The significance of this shift is embedded in how the 'political' role of the state within the Societies has become *always* defined and presented, and in how the fulfillment of the state secular laws has moved out to be an essential condition and a determining fixed factor for the continuation of a Coptic philanthropic space. Moreover, because of this shift, Coptic laymen like 'Atef and Maher have become able to 'mend' what they criticize within the benevolent services of the Church through spaces which are financed and administrated through their kinship relations. In doing so, they do not ignore their relation with the Coptic Patriarchate, but they have reconfigured it. In other words, instead of waiting to get places of *khidma* through the 'traditional' millet-system, they have found a

more efficient alternative to the 'failure' of the Church hierarchy regarding the establishment of Coptic philanthropic spaces. In the coming chapter, I will show how the production of a Coptic philanthropy within the Marguirguis Society redeem another 'failure' of the Coptic Patriarchate, one that is connected to the fulfillment of the needs of the *makhdomein.*

Chapter II. "Knock, and it shall be Opened unto You:" [18] To be a Recipient of Coptic Philanthropy

2.1. A Cold Easter

It was cold in April. The Easter in 2015 was not warm as it comes every year. I arrived to the Marguirguis Society around 5 p.m. on Sunday the 19th of April, to join *ijtima' ikhwet il-rab* (the assembly of the poor people, of the *makhdomein*). Since 2014, the assembly has weekly been held every Sunday in the new place of the Society. Inside the Society, around 60 women were sitting. By 6:00, the number increased to 80 ladies, whose ages vary between 40 to 80 years old. "As I mentioned before," said 'Atef, "the door of the Society will be closed at 6:15 because we have to start praying and to read the Bible. No one will be allowed to come after 6:15."

The women, who came after 6:15, after the door was closed, did not only miss the prayer. They also missed *tawzi' hedeyet il-kiyama* (the distribution of the Easter gift), namely two chickens and a pullover to survive the long winter, that followed *il-ijtima'*. This distribution was for all the women who came on this Sunday in specific because it is "*baraket el-'id* (the blessing of the feast)," as Maher put it. This means that it was for both the members and nonmembers from the *makhdomein.* However, at the end of every month, only the members, whose names are written in the accounting books of the Society, would be able to get the monthly financial aid, 25 EGP (2.5 Euros):

Mina: Would that be enough for a month? This could be the price of one or two meals.

Maher: This is what we write in the governmental documents…. The governmental documents require us to give them equal amounts of money…. We usually give some of them more,

[18] A Biblical Verse from the book of Mathew, Chapter 7.

depending on their individual conditions, but we do not write that in the accounting books…. Today's distribution will also not be written in the books. For me, I do not want to write anything in them…. But we should. When the governmental inspectors come, they should find something written, just to make sure that everything is fine.

Mina: Do the governmental inspectors know about that?

Maher: Definitely! They do not care.

Mina: Why do not they care?

Maher: We do not take money from them to care. They just care about the form of the accounting books. They just want to make sure that people are receiving fixed, equal amount money from us. They do not have time to check why we give one woman more than others.

My conversation with Maher reflects something different from what I have illustrated in the first chapter. The relation between the *khoddam* and the *makhdomein* in the Marguirguis Society is not wholly presented through the governmental accounting books per se. However, it is obvious how there are other dimensions of this relation, ones that operate without the regulation of the Egyptian government. Accordingly, in this chapter, I will argue about the reasons that have led to the emergence of these informal personal networks. I will show that these networks does not only reflect the autonomy of the *khoddam* to choose who could/could not receive donations from the Marguirguis Society. Moreover, they are also important in redeeming the deprivation that the *makhdomein* are exposed to because of their religious identity and of their economic status. However, because they operate through state secular laws, I will also demonstrate how these informal relations have their limitations, which are employed by the state when necessary.

2.2. The Ecclesial Government

In August 2014, the Coptic Patriarchate began to issue a nation-wide computerized central plan, which was completely made effective one month later. Essentially based upon a geographical allocation, this plan has guaranteed that each one of the *makhdomein* would be connected to only one church, depending on his/her place of staying.

As a matter of laying grounds for the application of the new central plan, the 25 churches placed in the neighborhood of Shubra were divided between two Bishoprics, Northern Shubra & Southern Shubra. In June 2014, Bishop Angelos has become responsible for 13 churches in Northern Shubra, and the 12 churches of Southern Shubra were put under the pastorship of Bishop Makary. Following the establishment of the Bishoprics and the application of the central plan, the 25 churches have unified the timing of the assemblies conducted for *khidmet ikhwet il-rab.* This unification has aimed at preventing the *makhdomein* from attending more than one assembly at more than one church. The temporal and the spatial aspects of the central plan of *khidmet ikhwet il-rab* in Shubra in particular and in whole Egypt in general operates through a mode of governance, which calls attention to the 'traditional' millet-system discussed in chapter I. This is because it manifests the spaces in which the Church clerical order is directly linked to and represents its congregants without any intervention from the side of the state and away from its regulations.

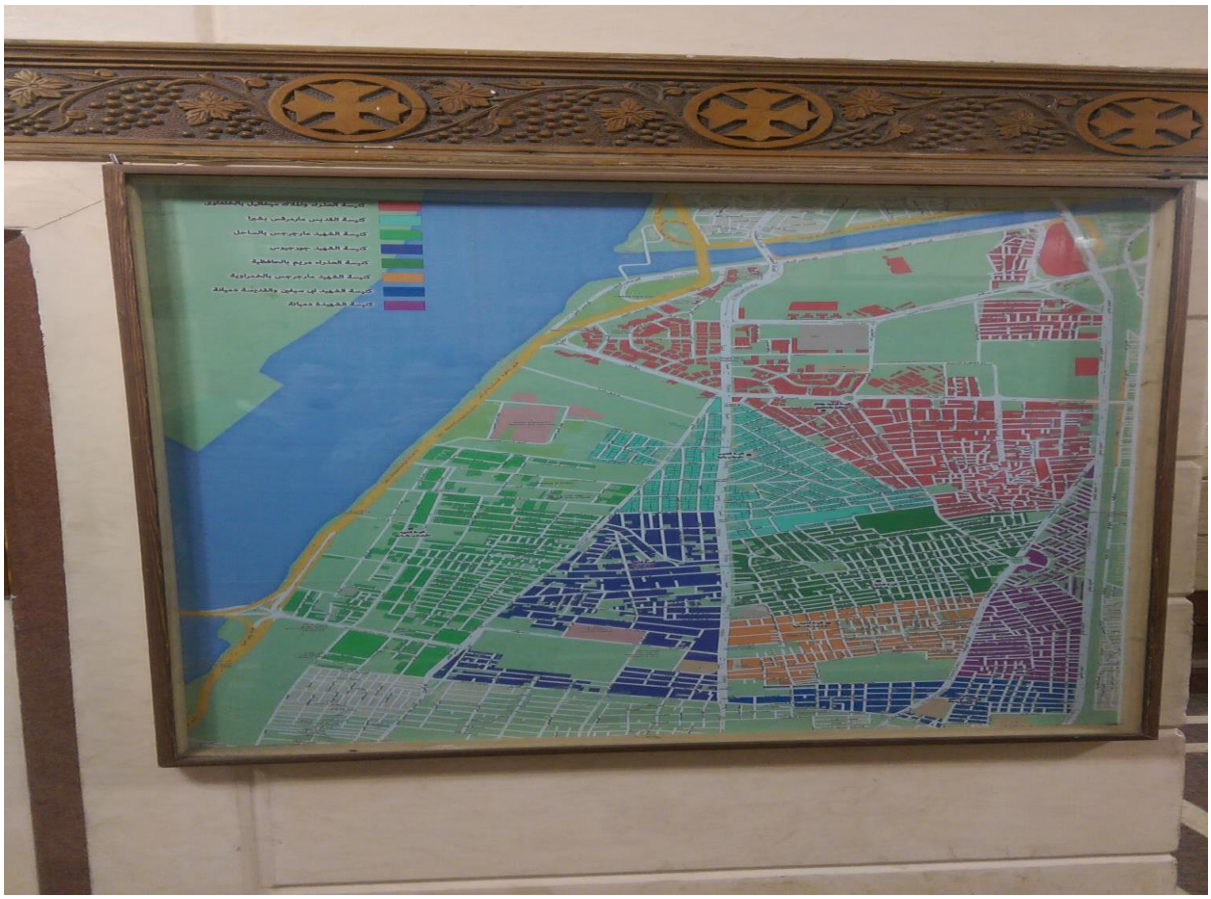

Figure 5. Northern Shubra Bishopric Schema- Each color presents an area that has become the responsibility of one of the 13 churches of the Bishopric (photo by Mina Ibrahim)

For his PhD dissertation, *Care of the Poor and the Ecclesial Government,* Boris Nikolov has conducted an ethnographic research on the social services offered by the Coptic Church hierarchy, and on how it influences the lives of the Copts, especially the poor among them. Nikolov adopts an Asadian approach of understanding the category of religion, as a "historical product of discursive processes" (Asad, 1993:29). He argues that what makes the traditions of the Coptic Orthodox Church a 'truly' lived experience is embedded in the "productive exercise of power which is not about restrictions, but about the shaping of the conditions that make living Coptic lives in Egypt possible" (2008:22). The "conditions" that Nikolov attempts to emphasize are mainly connected to the social spaces created by the Coptic clerical order. These spaces, on which the poor Copts would rely for the fulfillment of

their needs, and through which they would be clients of the ecclesial government of love, care and charity, are fundamental reasons for why they would act as "Christians, or enact their faith" under the authority of the Coptic Patriarchate (ibid).

The presence of the Coptic Patriarchate as the channel, which delivers the needs of its deprived congregants and, thus, shape their religious lives, is not only important for the analysis of the recent central plan issued by the Coptic Patriarchate. Moreover, it also stimulates an examination of decades, in which the Coptic Church was a 'gated-community.' To begin with, historian Paul Sedra (1999) has emphasized how the Church has become a state within the state, especially since the ruling period of President Mohamed Anwar El-Sadat (1970-1981). Pope Shenouda III, whose papacy began just one year after Sadat's presidency, developed networks of social services in rural and urban slums in many parts of Egypt (Sedra 1999:226). These networks, which were established by the Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services, resulted from two complementary policies adopted by Sadat's government.

Firstly, following 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Sadat managed to liberalize the Egyptian economy through what was known as *infitah* (open door policy). Due to the massive economic failures that encountered the state regulated public sector during the presidency of Gamal Abd El-Nasser (1954-1970), Sadat intended not only to privatize the state owned companies and factories, and to sell them to foreign (Arab & non-Arab) investors. He also attempted to reduce the subsidies that Nasser's regime had put on some of the basic food products (i.e. rice & wheat) on one hand and on the social services offered by the government on the other hand (Farah 2009). Secondly, Sadat planned to Islamize the Egyptian state and society. During his ruling, Sadat released the members of the Islamist groups, whom were prisoned and repressed

during Nasser's era. He did not only allow them to be politically active. Furthermore, he also permitted the young Islamists to endorse 'conservative' Islamic codes of ethics within the universities and the other public spaces so as to counter the political groups, namely the socialists, who opposed his economic policies (Al-Arian 2014).

As a result of these two intertwined economic and social policies, the Coptic Patriarchate turned out to be a hospital, an orphanage, and an elderly house. For the Coptic community, Pope Shenouda III became not only a religious leader but also a political one. Conferences were organized in 1976 and 1977 under his leadership to defend the rights of the Copts. Furthermore, amid the sectarian tensions that escalated by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Copts shouted from inside the Coptic Cathedral, "Pope Shenouda is our President" (Pennington 1982:174).

Consequently, from this section, one could detect another aspect of the 'traditional' millet-system. In chapter I, I have elaborated that the alliance and the reconciliation between the Egyptian state and the Coptic Patriarchate has caused the latter to represent the needs and the demands of its congregants away from the regulation of the Egyptian state. However, what has happened since the 1970s has manifested that the representational role of the Church is also substantial during moments of disturbance with the political ruling system. This is especially with respect to the poor Copts who have been in an urgent need to the assistance of the Church so as to get protection from the marginalization that they have encountered because of their poverty but also of their economic status. Such protection, to call Nikolov's argument, has been among the essential factors that could explain why the poor Copts would be holding their Christian faith under and because the centralized authority of the Coptic Patriarchate.

2.3. Problematizing the Ecclesial Government

During *Ijtima' ikhwet il-rab*, I was sitting inside one of the rooms, preparing *baraket il'id* with Mariam and Nadia. One of the *makhdomein* called Safa' came and began to tell the story of her son, who is studying law at Cairo University. Although the latter is a public school with very low fees compared to the private universities (200 EGP per semester or even less), Safa' did not have enough money to pay:

Safa': I asked them, if they can reduce the amount of the fees or even to waive it…. I know some people who did that before…if you are poor, you cannot pay…but for me, they refused…. I think because I am Christian…. They told me to go to the church, and to ask them for money…they have a lot of money there, and can help you.... My son's future would be destroyed, if I did not pay the fees.

Safa' then complained about how when she went to ask her[19] church (Saint Mary Church in Rod El-Farag Street in Shubra) for money, the priest there told her that her name is not written in the computer system of this church. Although she used to take money from this church, the situation has differed following the central. Safa' now belongs to St. Mina church in Shubra. Safa' told us that she refused to go to this new church because "I do not know anyone in it [in St. Mina church]…. I cannot ask for help from people that I do not know…. *Da ehrag kbeir leyya* (It is a humiliating situation for me)."

Safa' was not the only one who complained about the new central plan of the Church. Soad, a 60 years old lady, told me that because she is not living in Shubra, she would not be able to take money from any church in it. As she is living in another neighborhood in Cairo called Matariya, she has to check her name with the churches located around her place of living.

[19] By her church, I mean the church in which Safa' prays and attends liturgy there.

Furthermore, ‘Afaf, a young widow with two kids, emphasized that she has been forced to belong to a church, from which she gets less amount of money than the other church she used to go to before the implementation of the central plan. This is because, although all the churches are placed under one central ecclesial government, the budget of each one differs depending on the amounts of donations it receives from its financially capable congregants.

Consequently, the words of Safa’, Soad, and ‘Afaf require us to examine why they attend *ijtima’ ikhwet il-rab* at the Marguirguis, despite of the presence of benevolent services offered by the Church hierarchy. Moreover, they invite us to think about whether the social spaces of charity created by the ecclesial government are *alone* and *absolutely* able to shape the ‘faith’ and the ‘religious’ lives of the deprived Copts. In the Bible, Jesus says “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that ask receive; and he that seek find; and to him that knock it shall be opened” (King James Version, Matt. 7: 7-8). At this point, one should further analyze whom *else* should the poor Copts should ask, if the doors of the Coptic Patriarchate do not open, if they are not suitable, or if they are not sufficient.

My problematization of the ecclesial government and of its social spaces goes beyond the anecdotes of the *makhdomein* of the Marguirguis Society. Even during the worst moments of discrimination during the 20th century, when the Church was historically imagined to be the ‘safest haven’ from the economic and the social policies of Sadat’s regime, the spaces established by the ecclesial government were not *enough* to fulfill the needs of the poor Copts. Ironically, however, the state that appeared to exclude the Copts from the public sphere with its economic and social policies has itself allowed Coptic laymen to establish a massive number of Coptic charitable Societies.

To begin with, according to the "Religious Status Report" that was produced by the state-run Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (CPSS) in 1999, around 116 Coptic Orthodox charitable Societies were formed during the 1970s and the 1980s (253).[20] Such huge number was guaranteed by the 1971 constitution in which the regime of Sadat kept the secular law that has been facilitating the voluntarily establishment of NGOs since the 1923 constitution. Paradoxically, the expansion of the charitable Societies was met by great arbitrariness regarding the building of 'formal' churches, due to the hostile relation between Pope Shenouda III and Sadat (ibid:255). Hence, while such hostility gradually intensified till Sadat exiled and removed Pope Shenouda III from his position in September 1981,[21] poor Copts were at the same time asking for help from charitable Societies regulated by MOSA.

After his assassination in October 1981, the paradox of Sadat has remained with his successor, Hosni Mubarak during the 30 years of his ruling that extended between 1981 till 2011. Despite of his much better relation with Pope Shenouda III, Mubarak, who further implemented liberal economic policies, found that the charitable Societies would guarantee that the deprived Copts would be more attached to the state and to its regulations. Accordingly, in the following section, I will conceptually and historically contextualize this relation of assistance between the state and the poor Copts. In doing so, I will further analyze how moving the practice of philanthropy beyond the benevolent services of the Church hierarchy has impacted the lives of the poor Copts, and has influenced the means by which they live as Christians.

[20] Most of the NGOs in general and not only the Coptic ones were formed during this period.
[21] Pope Shenouda III was exiled among what was known as the September 1981 detentions, in which Sadat turned harshly against his opponents from different political factions.

2.4. Two Modes of Citizenship

As illustrated in chapter I, one central dimension of the political alliance of the 'traditional' millet-system is embedded in the demands made by the Coptic Church hierarchy to the ruling authority to increase its *waqf* properties. Engin F. Isin (2011) described this dimension "as acts of citizenship." In other words, instead of linking citizenship to an abstract legal status that claims absolute equality, Isin defines it "as the art of negotiating difference and claiming recognition through political means rather than using violence to annihilate *difference*" (210; emphasis added).

For Isin, therefore, the establishment *waqf* did not only prove the political influence of the hierarchical authorities of the non-Muslim religious communities. Moreover, the *waqf* was also associated with the autonomy of the individual members of these communities. In other words, to put Isin's argument into the context of my thesis, the successfulness of the Coptic Patriarchate to get *waqf* properties has indicated a full recognition of the rights of its congregation, especially the poor among them. This is because through the *waqf,* the ecclesial government would be able to fulfill the needs of its congregants. Hence, it could be argued that the citizenship associated with the 'traditional' millet-system has had a narrow spatial scope. It has signified that the citizenship of the Copts would solely be realized through and because of the construction of a 'gated-community' that would be administrated by the ecclesial government.

Nevertheless, with the secularization of the millet-system and with the rise of Benevolent Societies during the modernization processes of the 19th century, the meaning of the Coptic citizenship and of fulfilling the needs of the deprived Copts has become linked not just to the *waqf*. However, historian Mine Ener (2003) has emphasized how the redemption of the needs

of the poor Copt has become associated with the building of the nation as whole, and of how practice of the religious philanthropy has turned out to be an idiom of national belonging (101-102).

To begin with, the foundation of the Coptic Benevolent Society in 1881 was not only encouraged by the Muslim ruler Khedive ‘Abbas Hilmi II as elaborated in chapter I. Moreover, the opening ceremony of the Society witnessed the remarkable attendance of Sheikh Mohamed ‘Abdu and Sheikh ‘Abdullah Nadim (Tadros 1945:2). Two years earlier before the Coptic Society, these two Sheikhs established the Islamic Benevolent Society. Similar to Boutros Ghaly’s project, they were critical of the donating system of the Al-Azhar, which is the main Islamic institution, and is equivalent to the Coptic Patriarchate for the Muslims. The main reason by which the Sheikhs justified not only the formation of their Society, but also their support of Ghaly’s Coptic Society, was their imaginations that both Societies were able to effectively respond to the ‘modern’ Evangelical- European missionaries that had arrived to Egypt during the mid of the 19th century. For them, both Societies with their ‘Egyptian’ religious identities were able to substitute the ‘backward’ benevolence managed by the *waqf* properties, and to proficiently stand against the ‘non-Egyptian settlers’ (Ener 2003:99).

The situation did not differ much with the 1923 liberal constitution that has further legally facilitated the establishment of NGOs to counter the European missionaries as well. This constitution came after and resulted from the 1919 ‘revolution,’ which was known of its national unity slogans that reflected the solidarity of the Muslims and the Christians against the British colonial power. Moreover, it came after the February 1922 declaration of independence, through which the Egyptians were granted nominal independence, mainly with

respect to their internal political affairs.[22] Consequently, Coptic laymen who founded the Societies since the 1923 constitution were participants of a wider national project that signified the early years of a 'sovereign' Egyptian state. Moreover, the poor Copts, who accepted donations from these Societies, also benefited from citizenship rights granted to them through secular articles from the Egyptian national constitution.

2.5. The Paradox of the Secularized Millet-System

In her research about the voluntary work in the Italian region of Lombardy, anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach has argued about the voluntary work "that has emerged…at the very moment [when] the social services are being cut and privatized" (2012:6). She has emphasized how the volunteers have met the "increased inequality…by a structure of feeling that privileges empathy, care and compassion" (2013:300). Although invested by the state itself, this feeling, has paradoxically been a "public fetishization of sacrifice" that has been imagined to function beyond but also to resist the neoliberal economic policies of the Italian government (2012:7).

Similarly, I understand the Coptic charitable Societies, which have remarkably emerged since the 1970s to be alternative outlets that the Egyptian government has granted to the Copts so as to construct feelings of solidarity around their faith. However, the state has made sure that this solidarity would operate in the form of small, fragmented religious networks. Put differently, within the charitable Societies, the poor Copts have moved out of being collectively governed by their hierarchical order, as it has been the case with the 'gated community' 'traditional' millet-system. Instead, they have become more affiliated to personal relations with different, isolated groups of the Coptic laymen who are administrating these

[22] This was a unilateral declaration of independence formed by the British, through which the latter kept four reservations: foreign relations, military, communication, and the ruling of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

Societies. The presence of these fragmented networks have been important for the state for two main reasons.

Firstly, they would guarantee that the needs of the poor Copts would still be satisfied through the Coptic ethics of giving, without putting any financial burdens on the state. Secondly, however, unlike the benevolent services offered by the Church hierarchy, the state would ensure that these networks would function within spaces, which are founded by and originated out of its laws and regulations. During my fieldwork in the Marguirguis Society, I have remarkably noticed the presence of this paradox that exists between the financial independence from and the legal dependence on the state. Accordingly, throughout the rest of this chapter, I will attempt to further analyze the internal dynamics and the consequences of such paradox.

To begin with the financial autonomy, my conversation with Maher mentioned at the beginning of this chapter has emphasized the presence of a financial autonomy within the Marguirguis Society. Maher has demonstrated that the governmental inspectors do not really care about the amounts of money distributed among the poor women because the Society does not "take money from them (from the government)." This is because, as previously stated, the income of the Society mainly depends on the members of the General Assembly. Moreover, as a continuation to our talking, Maher has elaborated the sovereignty that they have regarding the choice of *makhdomein* who would be members of the Marguirguis Society, and who, as a result, would be able to get the monthly income:

Mina: What about the women who come to the Society, but whose names are still not written in the accounting books (who are not members)?

Maher: We should know them first before writing their names. They should come every Sunday to the assembly. After one month or two, we start to conduct a research upon them, and upon their conditions. This also takes around two more months. Afterwards, we see whether they deserve to be a member of the Society or not.

The financial autonomy of the Marguirguis Society did not only give sovereignty to its administrators to choose who would (not) deserve to be a member. Furthermore, the absence of a centralized monetary governance with respect to the Coptic charitable Societies, has enabled the *makhdomein* themselves to join more than one Society at the same time. Different from the ecclesial government that has prevented its poor congregants from having more than one charitable outlet, particularly with the implementation of the 2014 central plan, the *makhdomein* could be members of many fragmented, small religious networks. Hence, through the charitable Societies, the names of the *makhdomein* could be associated with multiple places of giving, depending on their ability to build linkages with the administrators of the Societies, and to prove that they deserve assistance. Consequently, the decentralization of the Coptic ritual of giving beyond the ecclesial governmental has provided the *makhdomein* with alternative means by which they could enact their faith. In other words, the social spaces of the Coptic Patriarchate have no longer become the absolute sources of authority that could explain why the poor Copts would act as Christians. Events such as the weekly *ijtima' ikhwet il-rab* of the Marguirguis Society, which are organized by the small fragmented networks of the Coptic laymen, have appeared to be associated with and contributing to the formation of their religious lives as well.

The fact that these events are organized within spaces that are linked to the regulations of MOSA also highlights the presence of a role for the Egyptian state with respect to the shaping

the lives of the poor Copts. The talking about such role will lead the argument to the other pair of the secularized millet-system paradox mentioned above, namely the legal dependency on the state. In her work, Saba Mahmood (2001) has argued about the importance of understanding the different regimes of "power and truth" under which the religious rituals are practiced (828). Her argument was specifically concerned with the Islamic ritual of *salat* (prayer). She has showed that although the *salat* is a formal, conventional behavior with prescribed rules, the changing of the "conditions of authority" that surround its functioning might affect the other informal, everyday aspects of a Muslim's life (ibid).

Correspondingly, moving out the practice of the Coptic philanthropy to charitable Societies that are regulated by secular laws does not necessarily indicate that there is something changed about *how* this ritual is performed. On the contrary, *Ijtima' ikhwet il-rab* included a speech by a Coptic Orthodox priest who was invited by Maher. It also embraced the Vespers, which is one of the seven official prayers of the Coptic Orthodox Church that are written in the Agpeya (book of hours).[23] Nevertheless, what has obviously changed with the spatial extension of the Coptic benevolent services is the means by which the everyday lives of the poor Copts have been affected. Put it simply, the availability of the poor Copts to join philanthropic spaces, from which they could get financial aid, has become reliant not only on the authority of their clerical hierarchy. However, with the rise of the charitable Societies, such availability has also turned out to be conditioned by whether or not these spaces would fit into and would be suitable for wider national concerns. I will end this chapter with an anecdote from the Marguirguis Society to further illustrate this point.

[23] Agpeya is derived from the Coptic word *ti agp*, which means an hour. It is a book that includes 7 prayers that are chronologically arranged in correspondence to the life of Jesus Christ. For further details see http://st-takla.org/Agpeya.html

2.6. Marguirguis of Everyone (A Reminding Conclusion)

"It is so easy to establish a Society…anyone can have a Society…. In Egypt there are thousands of them…. One has to just take care," said Tharwat after *ijtima' ikhwet il-rab*. Tharwat has explained his statement with an anecdote that happened in August 2013. This was approximately one month after the Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, who is affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood Islamist group, was ousted from his post through a military coup, "Nadia called me to urgently come to the Society…that was a strange situation…can you imagine that Mina... It is the first time for the police to come here and not together with inspectors from MOSA…. they thought that we could be financed by the Muslim Brotherhood…. *da kan habal w msh mafhoom!* (That was a crazy and a non-understandable incident!)."

After the ousting of Mohamed Morsi, hundreds of Islamic charitable Societies were closed by the security forced. They were accused of being administrated and financed by members from the Muslim Brotherhood. This was especially after the latter was declared as a terrorist group via a Court decision (Fahmy 2015). For Tharwat, it is "crazy and non-understandable" to think that a charitable Society called "Marguirguis Coptic Orthodox Society" would have any connections with an Islamist group. Nevertheless, names within this context are not necessary. In other words, during moments of upheaval, there would be no differences between an Islamic and a Christian Society. What would essentially count would be the legal abiding by the laws of the state. Consequently, what seems to be a religious autonomy granted by the state to the administrators but also to the *makhdomein* of the charitable Societies has its limits. These limits would be exposed and employed when necessary in the name of and to defend 'the national security and interests.'

In his argument about the genealogy of the 'modern' government of care, Foucault has emphasized how the rise of the welfare systems of the 'modern' nation-states has placed the Christian charity work of the late antiquity (Bröckling et al. 2011:3). In more concrete words, Foucault showed how the pastoral care provided by the medieval Christian Church has been seized by and grasped within the coercive apparatus of the state has grasped. However, within his analysis, Foucault did not refer to "the reconfigurations of religious life resulting from the displacements of religion from domains it used to occupy and the redefining of what religious life is by the modern state" (Nikolov 2008: 37). In this chapter, I have attempted to analyze how the religious lives of the of the poor Copts have been reconstructed as a result of the extension of the practice Coptic philanthropy to spaces that are regulated by the secular laws of the Egyptian government. In doing so, I have pointed out to how the decentralization of this mode of giving has allowed the Coptic laymen who administrate the charitable Societies to organize events through which their deprived counterparts would fulfill their needs and, hence, hold their faith away from the ecclesial government. Moreover, I have discussed how the means that would enable the poor Copts to act as Christians have been detached from the absolute enclosed protection of the Coptic Patriarchate 'gated community,' and has become linked to spaces that could be locked in case of nationwide situations of emergency.

Chapter III. Marguirguis of Adham: To be a Founder & a Recipient of Coptic Philanthropy

3.1. "Where is Adham?"

I was asked this question, and then I thought of how it is unusual for a pilgrimage to Christian holy places. Adham is a friend of mine from my undergraduate School. He is of a Muslim background. I asked him to join the trip that the Marguirguis Society organized to churches and monasteries in the upper Egyptian Governorate of El-Minya on the 25th of April 2015. Although Adham did not come because of personal circumstances, the fact that there was a potentiality for him to be with us, will get me back to the initial question of my thesis, what is the significance of the spatial extension of the Coptic charitable work beyond the control of the Church hierarchy, on the understanding of a Coptic philanthropic space on one hand, and on the religious lives of the Copts on the other hand? This inquiry is important within this particular context simply because if this trip would have been organized by the Church, Adham would have never been welcomed.

In this concluding brief chapter, I will try to respond to this inquiry in a slightly different manner from the previous two chapters. In other words, the presence of the Coptic charitable Societies does not only indicate that the religious lives and practices of the Copts have become regulated and controlled by the state through fragmented small networks. However, it because of these networks, the Coptic community has become able to expose and to share their beliefs with their Muslim counterparts, beyond the persecuted minority narrative.

3.2. A Matter of Protecting a Persecuted Minority

The very first few minutes of the year 2011 witnessed the murdering of 21 Coptic Christian, who were celebrating New Years Eve. This was due to a huge car bombing in front of the St. Mark & St. Peter Coptic Orthodox Church in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria (Coptic Christian Martyrs 2011, youtube.com). As a result, the Coptic Patriarchate asked the Egyptian Ministry of Interior to ban car parking next to any church. Moreover, security checkpoints were installed at the gates of the churches. One week later after the massacre, on the 6th of January, Copts were asked to show their national identification cards to get into the churches and to attend the Christmas Eve service.

The Egyptian national identification cards embrace one's religion. The Coptic Church has utilized them not only as a security procedure during highly populated events since the incident of Alexandria. Moreover, amid the implementation of the 2014 central plan that I have mentioned in chapter II, information about the poor Copts has been collected through them. This procedure has mainly aimed at checking whether or not the receivers of the charitable donations would be Christians. Therefore, the Coptic Patriarchate has turned out to be a 'gated-community' not only because it fulfills the needs of its deprived congregants through its ecclesial mode of governance. Moreover, it is a 'gated community' due to the fact that it protects its congregation by means of excluding Muslims not only from its benevolent services but also from the whole spaces in which these services are distributed.

3.3. A Matter of Becoming Together (and Superior)

Following the January 2011 uprisings in Egypt that ousted President Hosni Mubarak, I have been thinking about the spaces that could bring Muslims and Christians in the Egyptian society. This has mainly been due to the 'spirit' of the Tahrir Square, which was the Cairene center for the anti-Mubarak mass demonstrations. Inside Tahrir Square, for instance,

Christians and Muslims were sharing food, shelter, and clothes. Moreover, Christians were protecting Muslims during their prayers and vice versa.

Anthropologist Amira Mittermaier (2014) has labeled the Tahrir Square practices, which lasted for 18 days between the 25th of January and the 11th of February when Mubarak resigned, as "alternative modes of togetherness." Although she has not mainly emphasized the Muslims-Christians relations within the Tahrir Square, what is interesting for me in Mittermaier's argument is her notion of the "ethics of immediacy." Unlike the social justice disputes that require structural plans and long-term transformations, Mittermaier's ethics of immediacy reflects the presence of a mode of unity and equality that is "radically oriented towards the present…to the here and now" (ibid).

Inside the Tahrir Square, there was a sense of interconfessional solidarity that disregarded one's religious affiliations. During the 18 days, there were mutual feelings of assistance and support between Muslims and Christians that *immediately* happened. Few weeks subsequent to the incident of Alexandria, the Christian protesters in particular found themselves sharing a common cause with other millions of Egyptians. Instead of waiting for 'faraway' institutional and constitutional modifications through which they could attain religious equality, they discovered an instant opportunity by which they were able to overcome the narrative that has historically categorized them as a persecuted minority. In other words, whereas they were able to publically sing their religious hymns, raise their crosses, and read their Bibles in the streets of downtown Cairo, they imagined themselves to be spatially and temporally on the same social levels with their Muslim counterparts. As a result of and to further keep the 'spirit' of the Tahrir Square, the Coptic protestors did not only reject the appeals that Pope

Shenouda III made to them to leave the Square and to give Mubarak another chance to reform the country. Moreover, they also criticized him of being a supporter of a 'corrupt' ruler.

The capacity of the Copts to publically reveal their reglious identity among Muslims has not only been exceptional to the solidarity of the Tahrir Square. Furthermore, Anthony Shenouda (2010) has pointed out to the how the spiritual and miraculous incidents that the devout Copts experience in their lives grant them a sensibility of "moral superiority in the context of Muslim Egypt" (iv). Similarly, Sandrine Keriakos (2012) and Angie Heo (2012) have emphasized how the apparitions of Virgin Mary have moved the everyday interactions between Muslims and Christians to be favoring the doctrine and the piety of the latter.

The Tahrir Square, the miraculous incidents, and the apparitions of Virgin Mary are temporary events. What interested me in the topic of the Coptic charitable Societies is that they present historical fixed spaces, in which Copts have been able to negotiate and to prove their equality but also their superiority within the Egyptian community in a stable manner. To begin with, as illustrated in chapter I, Coptic laymen share common basis with their Muslim counterparts regarding the foundation of charitable societies. Since the 1923 constitution, they have attained equal legal opportunities to constitute benevolent outlets in consistency with their beliefs. Hence, the decentralization of the establishment of Coptic philanthropic spaces has allowed Copts to ask for their granted constitutional rights as Egyptian citizens.

Moreover, as a result of the charitable Societies, the formation of places that carry the name of Coptic Saints as Marguirguis has no longer become a matter of protecting the Copts against 'others.' Beyond the 'gated community' of the Coptic Patriarchate, it has led Copts to increase their interactions and to share their religious activities together with non-Christians.

To begin with, inviting my friend Adham to the pilgrimage not an odd occasion. Moreover, the governmental inspectors who regularly visit the Marguirguis Society are usually Muslims. Maher once told me that MOSA intentionally sends Muslim inspectors to Christian charitable Societies and vice versa to prevent any informal arrangements. Consequently, the fact that Coptic laymen build charitable Societies out of state secular laws has turned the jobs of these inspectors to be closely connected to the Coptic mode of giving. Through checking the accounting books of the Society, they have got familiar to the Christian prayers and symbols that are documented and stamped by the governmental seal. Thus, taking the Coptic philanthropy beyond the control of the Church hierarchy has facilitated the displaying of the Christian dogma. While the Coptic Patriarchate has installed security checkpoints at the gates of its churches to prevent non-Muslims from entering them, the Coptic charitable Societies have always been opening its doors for interconfessional dialogues.

The Coptic charitable Societies are not only welcoming the Muslim governmental inspectors. Following the closure of Islamic charitable Societies after the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi, MOSA asked Coptic Societies to accept the Muslims who were negatively affected by the closure of these benevolent outlets. Although MOSA declared that this would be a temporary procedure, and the Islamic Societies would shortly be reopened, media outlets that are affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood expressed their deep anger regarding this policy. For instance, one article in *Al-Masryoon* newspaper writes, "the discrimination of Muslims is not only limited to the Western, European countries…Muslims are also persecuted in Arab, Muslim countries (El-Shammas 2013). The rest of this article demonstrates a deep anxiety about how the Coptic Societies would substitute their Muslim counterparts, asking how Muslims would take money from Christians and through Christian rituals. The article asserts at the end that "now, the minority rules the majority."

The state secular laws that regulate both the Coptic and the Islamic Societies have blurred the lines that separate their different modes of giving. Moreover, their attachment to wide national concerns has constructed contingencies regarding who would be discriminated and who would be privileged. Consequently, taking the practice of Coptic philanthropy outside the 'gated-community' has empowered the Copts not because of their religious beliefs. However, it is due to the fact that these beliefs have become placed within spaces that have allowed the Copts to be further integrated into the Egyptian society, and to negotiate their identity within a broader political discourse.

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