

The discussion of Coptic issues in the  
Egyptian media, after the revolution –  
sectarian and polarizing?

*Spring 2013*

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Masters in Political Science, Department of Political Science

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

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# Abstract

During the first two months of 2011, the Arab Spring reached Egypt, and toppled president Hosni Mubarak. After the dissolution of the authoritarian regime, sectarian clashes between members of the two largest communities in the country, Muslims and Coptic Christians, exploded. Before the revolution, Egyptian media was used both by the Muslim and the Christian community to incite hatred towards the other, and thus helped prolong the conflict between them. Media is an important institution in the civil society, and as can be seen, what stance it takes may have grave consequences for the society as a whole, especially in a transition process, which Egypt currently faces.

The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether or not the Egyptian print media presents a sectarian and polarized view in their discussions of Coptic issues. In order to conclude that the print media does this, it has to meet these three conditions: present Muslims and Christians as inherently conflicting categories, encourage to violence or discuss issues that seem unsolvable or disruptive. A second objective of the thesis is to discuss the contribution the Egyptian media will be able to provide to the Egyptian transition process.

The study has analyzed three Egyptian newspapers: Al Ahram Online, Daily News Egypt and Egypt Independent and their articles covering Coptic issues throughout 2011 and 2012, in light of the three conditions presented above, to determine whether or not they are sectarian and polarizing, and discuss what contribution they can give to the transition process.

The findings of the study are that the discussion of Coptic issues in the three newspapers cannot be considered sectarian and polarizing, because they do not fulfill any of the three conditions. The study also conclude that the Egyptian media will contribute positively to the Egyptian transition process, through their diverse

presentation of beliefs, opinions and values, as well as their eagerness to deal with a new set of issues with more freedom than before.

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All deficits and errors of this thesis are exclusively my responsibility.

Oslo, May 2013

Marita Lehnert Haakenstad





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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The subject of the thesis

On February 11<sup>th</sup> 2011, the president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak resigned from his presidential position after three weeks of popular uprising. During these weeks in the start of 2011, the people of Egypt gathered in and around Tahrir Square in Cairo, raising demands for a democratic country free from the authoritarian regime that had reigned since Nasser's revolution in 1952. The revolution sent Egypt into a state of transition, where the Security Council of Armed Forces (SCAF)<sup>1</sup> took the lead, and an interim government was established pending elections for a new president, a new parliament and a new constitution. In phases of transition, countries are vulnerable and susceptible against any obstacles that could threaten their transition process. One of the threats that lurk in Egypt is the problem of sectarianism<sup>2</sup>. Since the 1970s the relations between the majority of Muslims and the minority of Christians<sup>3</sup>, especially the Coptic Christians<sup>4</sup>, has had a sectarian undertone that has created a hostile and sometimes even deadly environment.

What was most astonishing, during the revolution in Egypt, was that people gathered, despite class affiliation, gender or religion, and focused on a shared goal, to topple the regime. This unity was something the Egyptian society had not experienced for a long time. Joseph Fahim describes this in an article published by the Egyptian newspaper, Daily News Egypt:

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<sup>1</sup> The Security Council of Armed Forces is the governing body of 21 senior officers of the Egyptian military. They led Egypt during the interim period between Hosni Mubarak's departure February 11th, 2011 until the June 30th 2012 upon the start of Mohammad Morsi's term as president.

<sup>2</sup> Conflict between groups that arise from attaching importance to perceived differences due to religious attachment (Gooch and Williams 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Coptic Christians constitute about 7-9 million of the Egyptian population of approx. 85 million (The World Factbook 2013).

<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, Coptic Christians will also be referred to as Copts, Christians and Egyptian Christians.

*The march that started on the morning of the Jan. 25 and swiftly turned into the defining moment of Egypt's modern history changed everything, including all sectarian predicaments. In those three weeks, the religious identity took a backseat to something, in my book, more worthwhile: National pride.*

(Fahim 2011)

Elisabeth Iskander explains the communal peace during the three weeks of revolution with a re-categorization of the people temporarily into pro-Mubarak and anti-Mubarak camps. Factors that usually divided people were replaced by these two categories, which in this period served as the only important line of difference. Those three weeks could have been an optimistic sign for the future, but after the revolution sectarian clashes has exploded and sectarianism has "reared its head in the political and security vacuum that opened up during the transition" (Iskander 2012:172).

The situation between the Muslim and Christian communities in Egypt seems to be one of the greatest hinders for a successful political transition, because it threatens the stable and secure environment that is needed for a democracy to prosper. An institution that is of utmost importance in the development of the relations between the two communities is the media. I suggest that the way media treat the sectarian conflict and report about the situation between Muslims and Christians will have an influence on the public opinion in Egypt, about Copts role in the Egyptian society. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) has presented a public opinion theory that states that public opinion is a result of people's fear of isolation from society. This fear makes people with extreme or differing opinions fall silent, while other more socially accepted opinions prevail. In turn, people will eventually absorb these opinions and perceive the society according to the prevailing attitudes presented by the media. Thus media may contribute to the transition process by being observant of how they write about these topics.

For a long time, the issue of sectarianism was not handled in the Egyptian media, because the word “sectarian” was never used to describe the conflict between the two population groups. The coverage of sectarian conflicts has increased with the clashes, but a lot of the articles published by the Egyptian press about this subject, as well as Coptic issues in general, have been polarized and sectarian, leading media to prolong the conflict, rather than provide a neutral picture of the events and the problem, which is its original role. As long as the presentation of the conflict are not neutral, the way in which the media portrays the members of each group, can have a significant impact on the length and severity of social tensions (Iskander 2012:6).

Egypt is now facing one of its greatest opportunities ever to develop a society based on democratic values, where equal citizenship is an essential part. In processes of transition, citizens seek opportunities to develop new discourses through which a society forms and declares its values and identities (Kluver and Powers 1999 in Blankson and Murphy 2007:52). Media plays a fundamental part in this process, and scholars argue that it can have both a negative and a positive impact in the process of democratization. On the positive side, it may advance intercultural sensitivity, growth in participatory democracy, mutual tolerance and promote an open and peaceful dialogue. Conversely, it may also act as a vehicle for increasing ethnic, cultural and political conflict, especially in areas historically known for their cultural and political tensions (Marin and Lengel 2007:52).

Lance Bennett (1998) says that media may be very important and successful in the period leading up to the toppling of a regime. This is supported by a study of the Egyptian press news coverage during and after the revolution, conducted by Noah Rayman (2013). His research showed that the media, during the revolution, started to write about topics that had previously been off limits, like the presidency and the Muslim Brotherhood. The increased press coverage about previously forbidden subjects and about the recent demonstrations, as well as the fact that the regime never recovered to suppress the news coverage, made the Egyptian media a significant part of the revolutionary process.

In a revolutionary phase, the media can be said to have two roles; *the witness role* and *the reifying or confirming role*. Serving the role of the witness, the media are responsible for alerting both rulers and the ruled to the fact that everyone, both within and outside of the country, is aware of the subtle transformations of power that is occurring. In extension of this role, the reifying or confirming role is about giving the resistance movements external confirmation that their values are alive and popularly supported (Bennett 1998:200-201). The valuable role played by the media in the revolutionary phase, fades away when the country turns to a phase of political transition. Bennett (1998:196) claim that unregulated media in a newly democratizing context may be “more disruptive than productive in the formation of stable institutions and patterns of citizen participation”. To support this argument, Bennett says that coming from an authoritarian regime the civil society often does not have the right mechanisms and tools, to handle a political transition (Bennett 1998:198). It is through the media that public discourse about the scope and nature of democracy is circulated, even – or perhaps, especially – in fledgling democracies (Murphy 2007:2). If the people are not trained in a democratic discourse, the media suddenly promoting free and unrestricted public opinions could instead of liberalizing the society put more pressure on the people, who will suffer from an environment with confusing messages, unrealistic promises and fantasies about what the future brings. The promise of democracy, in the end, rests on the rights and responsibilities of the citizens of the nation. How these citizens respond to such an opportunity is not only a question of political organization, but is also dependent on how they have been encouraged to think about and participate in democracy through the news media (Murphy 2007:8).

## **1.2 Research Question**

Based on Bennett’s argument about the media causing more harm than good in a transition process, and the coverage of Coptic issues and the sectarian problem in the Egyptian media prior to the revolution, I have chosen the following research question:

*RQ: To what extent is the discussion of Coptic issues in the Egyptian press, after the revolution, sectarian and polarizing?*

With this question I aim to find out if the Egyptian print media is presenting a sectarian and polarized picture of the Copts and their situation in Egypt, after the revolution. Based on theoretical perspectives like Noelle-Neumann's "public opinion theory", I argue that if sectarian and polarized views on Copts still prevail in the Egyptian media, this will have a negative influence on the public opinion, prolong the sectarian conflict and make media's contribution to the transition process unproductive.

Before continuing, it is necessary to operationalize the two concepts, *sectarian* and *polarizing*, that appears in the research question. This is important in order to have some kind of reference point so one know what to look for in the empirical material to determine whether the Egyptian press is sectarian and polarizing in the discussion on Coptic issues. Sectarianism can be defined as "a narrow-minded adherence to a particular sect (political, ethnic or religious), often leading to conflict with those of different sects or possessing different beliefs" (Gooch and Williams 2007:242). This narrow-mindedness can lead to bigotry, discrimination and hatred, when one attach importance to the perceived differences between subdivisions within a group. A polarized view in the media can be related to media bias, which can manifest itself as suppression of certain information. Media can selectively omit relevant information from their reporting, that conflicts with their viewer's beliefs and preferences. Even though the audience can be aware of this omission, it is difficult for them to obtain the missing information, and thus get a neutral picture of the events (Bernhardt, Krasa and Polborn 2008:1-2).

So, what does it mean that the media discussion is sectarian and polarizing? I have identified three conditions that will be helpful when analyzing articles from the

Egyptian press. In order for the media discussion to be categorized as sectarian and polarizing at least one of these three conditions have to be present in some way:

- 1) The media present Muslims and Copts as inherently conflicting categories.
- 2) The media encourage violence.
- 3) The issues that are being discussed in the media seem unsolvable and/or disruptive.

Based on these three conditions I will be able to analyze and conclude whether or not the media discussion of Coptic issues can be termed sectarian or polarizing.

### **1.3 The purpose of the thesis**

The purpose of this thesis is to study the Egyptian press coverage of Coptic issues after the three week long revolution in 2011, and determine whether or not this coverage can be considered sectarian and polarizing. Media is an important institution in the civil society, and it will play an important role in the transition process. Thus, a second objective of the thesis is to discuss the contribution the Egyptian media will be able to provide to the Egyptian transition process.

### **1.4 Terms and concepts**

In this section I will present the most important terms and concepts that are used in this thesis. It is important to operationalize some of the concepts, so that one understand how they are defined and in what ways they are used in the paper to explain, assess and analyze different findings.

#### **1.4.1 Coptic issues**

Coptic issues can contain almost anything. One has to assume that they are issues that are of especially importance for the Coptic Christians in their daily life in Egypt, or



they are issues concerned with the Coptic population in the Egyptian society. In this paper I will address the issues that I find are most frequently being discussed in the Egyptian media after the revolution, assuming that they are of most importance for the Coptic community, as well as for the Egyptian society as a whole.

One of the most important issues, especially in the process Egypt finds itself in now, is that of citizenship and civil rights for the Coptic community on equal terms as their Muslim brethren. The question of citizenship is especially interesting in Middle Eastern states. Rania Maktabi (2012:22) claim that state power in many of these states is central in “establishing, sustaining and perpetuating the unequal distribution of civil rights among the citizenry”. Central here is the political regime’s management of religious law as a part of state law, which might lead the ones belonging to the state religion to adopt feelings of superiority over people belonging to other religions. The unequal distribution of civil rights in Egypt is especially visible when one look at the basic civil right, freedom of religion. One of the main discussions important for the Copts in the discussions after the revolution is the possibility to renovate existing church buildings or build new ones. Copts seeking for such permissions have met a bureaucratic system with regulations from the Ottoman-era that restricted where churches could be located, forbidding church constructions within a certain number of meters of existing mosques or graveyards (Langohr 2001). In addition to this, one needed personal presidential approval for even simple repairs, and this was blamed for delays of more than a decade in the issuing of permits to build churches. President Mubarak eased these regulations, and delegated the responsibility to local governors instead, but the problem with church buildings continues to be one of the most important sources for sectarian clashes to this day (Bradley 2008:97).

Another issue that is connected to Copts daily life, but also the Coptic community’s standing in the Egyptian society as a whole, is the role of the Coptic Church. After a major sectarian incident in Imbaba in May 2011, the debate in the Egyptian press was concerned about the issue of conversion from one religion to another and journalists

and writers discussed the rights of the Coptic citizens, not just in the state of Egypt, but inside the Coptic Orthodox Church as well.

The last issue that has been heavily debated is the issue of law enforcement after sectarian clashes. The policy of enforcing the law equally on perpetrators of sectarian events has been weak, thus being an issue that prolongs the social tension in the country. A debate that keeps recurring independent of the nature of the sectarian clashes, is concerned with law enforcement and the need to prosecute the perpetrators. This may be a key issue that needs to be resolved, in order to fight and defeat the sectarian problem.

I have categorized the most discussed issues into three categories. These categories are *citizenship*, *the role of the Coptic Church in the Egyptian society* and *law enforcement*. The category of citizenship encompasses discussions concerned with obtaining equal rights for Christians and Muslims. Within this category one finds the discussion about the need for a unified law on places of worship. Within the category of the role of the Coptic Church in the Egyptian society one find debates that are concerned with the Coptic Church's conservative thinking regarding divorce, remarriage and conversion to Islam. The last category encompasses discussions about the importance of prosecuting perpetrators of sectarian events, in order to remove vengeance thinking and enforce the law equally on all citizens.

#### **1.4.2 Sectarianism**

I have already touched upon the concept of sectarianism, but it is necessary to give a detailed explanation of this concept, so that one understand how this can be expressed in the Egyptian society.

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR 2010) defines sectarian violence as:

*Any use of violence, regardless of degree or type, by an individual or group affiliated with one religion against an individual or group not affiliated with that religion, or against their property or houses of worship, if religious affiliation was one of the motives of violence or a factor in the escalation of violence, or if such violence included attacks on religious practices, places of worship or religious symbols.*

William Sims Bainbridge (2007:1216) defines religious sectarianism as:

*The tendency of people to believe that their religion is superior to all others. The term also can refer to the process by which religious organizations split apart into competing fragments, and to the social factors that maintain the separateness of each group. Thus, sectarianism is associated with the fragmentation of society, even as it creates a relatively cohesive religious community in each particular sect or denomination.*

In this thesis, sectarianism will be understood in terms of these two definitions.

EIPR's definition, emphasize the use of violence, and can therefore be useful in order to decide which events that can be said to be expressions of sectarianism.

Bainbridge's definition emphasize the social and, in the end, the political implications of sectarianism. The belief of one group's superiority over another causes fragmentation in society, and can explain the discrimination experienced by the Copts on several levels in Egypt. The emphasis on violence and the social and political implications of sectarianism can be found in the first two conditions, which need to be present in the coverage of Coptic issues to claim that the Egyptian press is sectarian and polarizing.

In their report from 2010, EIPR has defined over 50 incidents as sectarian events between 2008 and 2010, and they found that two types of incidents accounted for the largest percentage of the cases: *collective retribution* and *objection to Christian worship*. Collective retribution target adherents of a particular religion in one area,

and the attacks spring from an irrational conviction that all Christians in the area are responsible for an act attributed to one or more Christians towards one or more Muslims, and because of this it is believed that all Muslims in the specific area are responsible for revenging that act.

The second type of incidents is objections to Christian worship. EIPR claims that these incidents are not only initiated by Muslim citizens, but from state officials as well. One of the biggest issues related to these incidents concerns church buildings, and stem from discrimination related to building, renovating or completing construction work on churches. Church buildings are central to the conflict between Christians and Muslims, because they are often the place where the conflict culminates, and they often become the target of attack. As can be seen later in the thesis, church buildings were central aspects in two of the biggest sectarian incidents that occurred in the first year after the revolution.

### **1.4.3 The Egyptian Press**

Egyptian print media can be divided into three rough groupings: government and semi government papers, opposition papers and independent papers. Papers in the first category are either explicitly government “mouthpiece’s” or have their editor-in-chief appointed by the regime. They have firmly entrenched standards of what is acceptable in terms of writing about their bureaucratic benefactors. These papers often have the shape of “events only” reporting, where the context or explanation as to the “how” and “why” are excluded. The opposition papers are straightforwardly in conflict with the government. They often criticize the regime, not by direct attack but by highlighting the poor state of the Egyptian society. These papers are almost entirely niche papers, read by party members or sympathizers. The independent papers are diverse in their quality, but in the high-end they are joint-stock operations that offer a wide variety of opinions and attempt to cover the news objectively. They are also active in examining the activities of the government and willing to be active

politically in search of more journalistic freedom. These papers have a broad base of interest, and are read by the intellectuals as well as the poor (Grant 2008).

I have used three Egyptian newspapers as a source for this thesis, Al Ahram Online, Egypt Independent and Daily News Egypt. These papers are located in two of the three groups presented by David Grant above. The printed version of Al Ahram is the most widely circulating Egyptian daily newspaper and was founded in 1875, which makes it one of the oldest newspapers in the country. The online version of Al Ahram was launched in 2010. This paper belongs to the group of government papers, and is regarded as loyal to the regime, as the Egyptian government is the majority owner (Al Ahram Online 2010). Egypt Independent was founded in 2002, and has since its establishment challenged Al Ahram for the status of being the national paper of record (Egypt Independent 2013). This newspaper is among the independent papers in Egypt, and has been unafraid to take on some hard-hitting topics. It has been regarded as one of the most influential papers in the country. The third, and last newspaper, Daily News Egypt was founded in 2005, and is also among the independent newspapers. The paper was out of production for a month in 2012, but has been re-launched and states that it has the ambition of being one of the main contributors of English news publishing in Egypt (Daily News Egypt 2013).

## **1.5 Refinements**

Because of the time span and spatial limits of the thesis, I have had to refine the study so that it is feasible. The next section presents the choice of case and time period, that are the subject of my study.

### **1.5.1 Choice of case**

The case for this thesis is the Egyptian print media during and after the revolution in 2011. The subject of interest is not the Egyptian media in general, but how they treat Coptic issues specifically. This case is interesting, because I believe that the coverage

of Coptic issues in Egyptian media, has an impact on the Egyptian people's opinion about Copts, which in turn will influence the contribution the media can have on the transition process in the country.

In the process of choosing a case, one often chooses the case on background of the case being either typical or crucial for the phenomenon under study. A typical case is considered to be especially representative of the phenomenon under study, while a crucial case will represent the most difficult scenario for a given proposition and are thus biased against the attainment of certain results (Gerring 2007:49). The case I have chosen can be considered a typical case. This is because there has been and still is a severe tension between the Muslim and Christian community in Egypt, and thus one can expect that the phenomenon, media's influence on the public opinion towards the Copts, can be easily traced in this case.

The findings from this case may shed light on a bigger population concerning media's role in countries that undergoes political transition process, while at the same time experiencing social tension among religiously divided groups in their society.

### **1.5.2 Time period**

The primary focus of this thesis will be on the period from January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2012. First and foremost, the research question sets natural limits on the time span. But this time period is also very interesting because it is a dynamic period in the recent history of Egypt. During this period president Hosni Mubarak resigned, the parliament was dissolved and the process of writing a new constitution started, sectarian clashes exploded, the head of the Coptic Church, Pope Shenouda died and the new Pope Tawadros was inaugurated and the Muslim Brotherhood won the president seat, with their candidate Mohamed Morsy. Because of all these changes in a short amount of time I expect that one will see some changes in the Egyptian media's coverage of Coptic issues.

In addition to the time period being interesting to study in itself, the sources also put a limit to the time span. I will study Egyptian newspapers in order to see if there has been any change in the public debate about Coptic issues, and most of these newspapers do not have any thorough online archives. Most of them do not have articles preceding 2010, and therefore it would have been impossible to conduct a study like this with a greater time span.

## **1.6 Outline of the thesis**

The outline of the thesis will be as follows. In the second chapter, I will present the methods I have used to conduct this study. One important part of this chapter is the section that presents the specific methods for this thesis, which gives a picture of the process of writing this thesis. This presentation will strengthen the reliability of the paper, which there also will be a discussion of in the methods chapter, along with methodological problems I have faced during the study.

In chapter three I will present different views on how the media can act in divided societies going through a political transition process, through the perspectives of George Bennett and Patrick O'Neil. Further I will present Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's theory on mass media and its influence on public opinion, and Lubbers, Scheepers and Vergeers views on media and polarization in divided societies. In the end I will present Curran's three roles the media should undertake during democratization processes and in democratized societies.

In chapter four the intention is to provide the reader with a brief introduction to the background that lays the premises for the situation in Egypt today. Here I will present the development for the Coptic community since 1952, as well as the development of Coptic issues in the Egyptian media. In the end of this chapter, I will also provide the reader with a brief summary of the Egyptian context today, concerning the media and the situation for the Copts after the revolution.

In the fifth chapter I will analyze the three discussions presented above in the light of the three conditions that needs to be present in order to call the discussions sectarian and/or polarizing, and make a conclusion as to whether or not the Egyptian media discussion can be termed sectarian and polarizing. In the concluding chapter, I will present the findings of the study, as well as attempt to gather the threads from the thesis.



## **2 Methods**

This thesis is a qualitative case study, where I use the method of document analysis to analyze the Egyptian press coverage of Coptic issues during and after the revolution in 2011. With this case study, I intend to conclude on whether or not the Egyptian media's coverage of Coptic issues is sectarian and polarizing. In the end I attempt to conclude on whether media's coverage will contribute positively to the political transition process that the country undergoes.

### **2.1 The case study - advantages and disadvantages**

The case study method is a research design that can be used with a range of different methods. Gerring (2007:20) defines the case study as “the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger set of cases”. One of the qualities of the case study is that the unit under special focus is not considered a perfect representative of the population. This has at least two implications. First, the intent of the study is not to generalize the findings, but instead transfer knowledge to cases that can be considered similar. And, second, case study methods are thus better at internal validity than external validity.

When choosing research design one first has to consider what the research goals of the study is. It's the basic research goals and the empirical universe of the thesis that often decide between the case study and the cross-case research design. Gerring presents a list of eight trade-offs the researcher has to consider in order to choose the research design. This list can be used to present some of the advantages of the case study research design. Case studies are more concerned with hypothesis generating than hypothesis testing. They prioritize internal validity above external validity. Case studies give an insight into causal mechanisms (a pathway from X to Y), rather than measure the causal effects of this mechanism (Gerring 2007:37-38). Looking at these advantages, the case study research design is the right choice for this thesis, because

the goal is to generate new hypotheses about media's impact on political transition processes in religiously divided countries, rather than test already existing hypotheses.

Gerrings list also present some of the disadvantages of the case study research, one of the most common critiques to the research design is that it is difficult to generalize the results, thus making it a less valued design. Another limitation that is criticized by George and Bennett (2005:25) is that case studies is only able to make “tentative conclusions on how much gradations of a particular variable affect the outcome in a particular case or how much they generally contribute to the outcomes in a class or types of cases”. This is related to the trade-off between insight into the causal mechanisms, rather than being able to measure the causal effect of the mechanism. Giving an increased insight into causal mechanisms, this case study aim to find out how media may have an impact on transition processes. What is difficult to find out, however, due to the methods, is how great media's impact is. George and Bennett claim that case studies instead are stronger at identifying the scope conditions for a theory, and consider arguments about causal necessity or sufficiency for a specific phenomenon to occur, rather than estimating the causal effects across a range of cases.

One of the qualities of the case study research is that it may employ a great variety of techniques to gather and analyze the evidence (Gerring 2007:33). To study to what extent the Egyptian media discussion about Coptic issues is sectarian and polarized I need to go directly to the sources, which in this case means three Egyptian newspapers. In order to analyze the content of these Egyptian newspapers, I will use the method of document analysis.

## **2.2 Document analysis**

Altheide (1996:2) say that: “Document analysis refers to an integrated and conceptually informed method, procedure, and technique for locating, identifying, retrieving and analyzing documents for their relevance, significance and meaning”. Studying newspapers and the public debate in them, can provide us with information

about the society. Altheide shows to a numerous amount of studies that suggest that public perceptions of problems and issues incorporate definitions, scenarios and language from news reports<sup>5</sup>.

The research question are helpful in choosing the appropriate unit of analysis, or which portion or segment of the relevant documents that will be investigated (Altheide 1996). In the study of newspapers one have several choices for the unit of analysis it could be a particular page, individual articles or even paragraphs. But in most cases, the unit of analysis is the individual news reports as is also the case in my thesis.

Choosing a sampling strategy, the researcher often starts out with a wide strategy based on her assumptions of what material is needed in order to answer the research question. When the researcher increases her understanding of the topic, one can choose a sampling strategy called “progressive theoretical sampling”, which is based on an emerging understanding of the topic under investigation (Altheide 1996:33-34). The goal is to obtain all the relevant articles for the thesis, but at the same time omit all the articles that can be seen as irrelevant. Altheide (1996:50) emphasizes that: “part of the task of informed document analysis is to be familiar enough with the publication(s) providing research materials and the major terms and concepts used so that few articles will be missed”.

## **2.3 The process of document analysis**

Altheide (1996) provides the researcher with a list of 12 steps to conduct in the process of document analysis. These steps has functioned as a guideline for the gathering, structuring and analyzing of the data material for this thesis, but as can be seen they have not been followed literally at all times. Many of the steps tend to overlap and during the process I have found myself jumping back and forth between

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<sup>5</sup> Altheide & Snow 1991; Bennett 1988; Cornstock 1980; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach 1982:244ff; Snow 1983.

them. I will now present the 12 steps, and parallel to this include notes about my own research. Through this, the reader can obtain information about my research process, and be able to conduct the same research if interested.

*1. Pursue a specific problem to be investigated.*

The problem that I want to investigate is the Egyptian media and its presentation of Coptic issues during and after the revolution, and if this presentation can be considered sectarian and polarized. If media provides the Egyptian public with a sectarian or polarized view of Copts, this could make its contribution to the Egyptian transition process unproductive.

*2. Become familiar with the process and context of the information source. Explore possible sources of information.*

Patrick H. O'Neil (1998) says that media's role in a phase of transition is related to the context in the previous media system. Using three factors presented by O'Neil, I will set the Egyptian media in a context in the end of the chapter outlining some of the background for this study.

Choosing the sources of information was an easy task. It was clear that I needed to gather my own empirical data for the thesis, and thus I had to go to the Egyptian media. Due to both limitation in time and resources, I chose not to use Egyptian television channels as a source. Instead I chose the printed media, which was relatively easy to obtain via the Internet, and easy to gather and structure throughout the process. In the process of choosing which Egyptian newspapers to use, I had four criteria's:

- 1) The newspaper had to be written in English.
- 2) It had to have a usable search engine, meaning that it produced relevant results and the possibility to perform a more advanced search.
- 3) It had to have articles from the period that I am interested in (January 2011-December 2012).
- 4) It had to have a clear site that was easy to navigate in.

I found a list over ten Egyptian newspapers that had English websites, and I tested them against the four criteria's mentioned above. The biggest problem was the lack of usable search engines, which I mean is very important in order to obtain all the data that can be relevant for the thesis. If the search produces unclear results you can lose relevant data, which in turn leads to gaps in your data sample and may damage the reliability and validity of the paper. At the end of this process, I had found three newspapers: Daily News Egypt ([www.dailynewsegypt.com](http://www.dailynewsegypt.com)), Al Ahram Online (<http://english.ahram.org.eg/>) and Egypt Independent ([www.egyptindependent.com](http://www.egyptindependent.com)). These papers were all published in English. They had good search engines, at least compared to the standard of the newspapers that were omitted. The engines produced relevant results, and the articles were presented in a chronological order so the job of collecting and structuring them for the analysis were easier. Concerning the period they covered, they all had articles covering the research question for the requested time period. They also fulfilled the last criteria, which was that they all had a clear site that was easy to navigate in.

*3. Become familiar with several examples of relevant documents, noting particularly the format. Select a unit of analysis (e.g. each article), which may change.*

It is most convenient to study the articles from the newspapers chosen, in order to obtain enough information. And the unit of analysis would be articles covering Coptic issues during and after the revolution.

*4. List several items or categories (variables) to guide data collection and draft a protocol (data collection sheet).*

It soon became clear to me, that there was three main categories concerning Coptic issues in the Egyptian media, which contained discussions that was heavily debated and written about, namely *citizenship, the Coptic Church's role in the Egyptian society and law enforcement*. The reason why these discussions were chosen for the thesis, was not only because of the amount of articles written about them, but also due to their importance for the political transition process.

*5. Test the protocol by collecting data from several documents.*

I have used three newspapers to test the categories, and found out that the discussions that are presented in the analysis chapter are the ones that have been the most important concerning Coptic issues, in all three newspapers after the revolution.

*6/7. Revise the protocol and select several additional cases to further refine the protocol. Arrive at a sampling rationale and strategy.*

As soon as the process of finding the newspapers, subject to the thesis, was finished, I started to search for the adequate keywords that ensured that I found all the articles that would be relevant in order to answer the research question. To find articles writing about Coptic issues, I started my search with the very general keyword “Copts”. This keyword generated articles that were not relevant for the paper, but as stated by Altheide, it is a useful point of departure and it emerged my understanding of the subject of interest. The specific keywords that I used were: sectarian tension, sectarian clashes and Coptic citizenship. Those were useful to find articles about specific events; what happened, why did it happen, how did it happen and what consequences did it have for the actors involved.

*8. Collect the data, using pretext codes, if appropriate, and many descriptive examples. Complete data collection.*

Having chosen these three discussions I started on the work of gathering, structuring and categorizing the data material, as well as omitting articles that was of no interest to the analysis. During the collection of the data material I categorized the articles in maps. First after the keywords that I had used to find them, and then in maps by year: 2011 and 2012. After collecting all the data, I organized the articles again after their topics. Through this process it was easier to see which issues that were of most concern to each newspaper, and again if one of the papers stood out, in form of writing about something that the two others did not. Organizing the articles also made it easier to determine and specify the research question for the thesis, because I got a clearer picture of what was interesting to study.

*9. Perform data analysis, including conceptual refinement and data coding.*

When performing the data analysis, I have used the three conditions presented in the introduction chapter:

- 1) The media present Muslims and Copts as inherently conflicting categories.
- 2) The media encourage violence.
- 3) The issues that are being discussed in the media seem unsolvable and/or disruptive.

*10/11/12. Compare and contrast “extremes” and “key differences” within each category or item. Write brief summaries or overviews of data for each category (variable). Combine the brief summaries with an example of the typical case as well as the extremes.*

During the process of reading the data material, I wrote several textual notes and brief summaries, with examples and “key differences” among the articles from the three newspapers. In this process it was interesting to see if the opinions expressed in one newspaper, differed from opinions expressed in one or both of the other newspapers. These notes were especially helpful during the process of writing the analytical chapter.

## **2.4 Methodological problems during the study**

What is important to have in mind is that the analysis has been conducted based on the data material provided by Al Ahram Online, Daily News Egypt and Egypt Independent. These three papers can be considered moderate, and one assumption from this is that one might not find the most extreme opinions and values here, which one in turn could expect to find in more radical newspapers. Though there is not a research goal in case studies to generalize your findings it is interesting to use these newspapers, as a source, because one can assume that if one find discussions that is sectarian and polarizing in these papers, one will find this in the Egyptian media field as a whole.

One aspect of the study that may produce a methodological problem is the language. Since I do not speak or read Arabic, I cannot read and study material from newspapers in Egypt that solely publish their news in Arabic. This affects which newspapers I have been able to read, and which ones I have not been able to obtain information from. One relevant example, which one could claim to cause some bias to the data material, is that I have not been able to study the Coptic newspaper, Al Watan. Thus, I have not been able to collect data that solely provide information about how the Copts themselves perceive their situation after the revolution. This may influence my conclusion about for instance the scope of Coptic issues. The Copts may have another view of which issues that is most pressuring and relevant for discussion, in order for them to improve their situation in the country.

In addition to this, it would also have been very interesting to see how the Coptic media themselves, presents the situation among the Muslim and Christian community, and whether or not they present discussions that could be termed sectarian and polarizing. I believe that this problem will not have a great effect on the thesis, because the data material is gathered from two of the most influential newspapers in Egypt, whereas one is government-owned and the other is independent. One has to assume that the Coptic voice is present in these papers, so that one gets an impression of this community's opinions and views as well.

Another problem concerned with the language is that the newspapers that publish in English are aware that they can reach a wider audience, outside of the Arab-speaking world. This may influence how they present different issues. Knowing that their reporting can be read by an international audience, might lead the newspapers to write about issues in a certain way, that puts Egypt in a better light, and not always present a neutral picture of events that occur. Thus, they may be biased in their reporting. I would assume that this is first and foremost a problem for the state owned newspapers, and not so much the independent newspapers. Since I have representatives of both of those categories in this thesis, I believe that the holistic view



I am left with after the reading decreases the eventual bias that may exist in the reporting.

## **2.5 Reliability and validity**

The problem with qualitative studies, especially in social and political sciences, is that it is difficult to measure one's findings, and thus make robust conclusions, which in turn can be generalized to other cases. This is not the objective of qualitative studies. Case study research often move down the “ladder of generality” in order to make contingent generalizations according to the scope conditions of the theory (George and Bennett 2005:77). And what are important in qualitative studies are the concepts of validity and reliability.

Validity is often divided in internal and external validity. Case study research is best at internal validity, which is concerned with the method, and if the method used examines what it intends to investigate. Observing a single case over some time, make the researcher fit to decide what information is relevant and what is not. An advantage of the case study is that it gives the researcher the potential for achieving high conceptual validity. Conceptual validity means that the researcher can identify and measure the indicators that best represent the theoretical concepts the researcher intends to measure (George and Bennett 2005:19). This is especially important in social sciences because a lot of the concepts one is interested in are difficult to measure.

The concept of reliability is connected to the data material of the study, and how accurate the operationalized variables are measured. In order to strengthen the reliability the researcher first needs to give a thorough description of the context the study is conducted in, in order to provide the reader with the same presumptions before being exposed to the analysis. The second thing that needs to be done is to provide an open and transparent description of the method one has used throughout

the process, so that others can pursue the same study and come up with approximately the same results (Johannessen, Tufte & Christoffersen 2010:229-230).

The validity of the thesis is secured by the operationalization of the variables to be measured. The variables that needs measuring in this thesis is the amount of sectarian and polarized views in Egypt's media discussion. In order to measure this, I have operationalized sectarian and polarized press coverage to mean that the media present Muslims and Christians as two inherently conflicted categories, that the media encourage to violence or that they discuss issues that seem unsolvable or disruptive, these three conditions will function as yardsticks in the analysis.

In order to strengthen the reliability of my thesis, I have presented the entire work process earlier in this chapter. This can be seen as a model, if other researchers are interested in conducting the same study. The detailed bibliography with references to where you can find all the articles, that are the main source for my thesis also strengthens the reliability of the thesis. Since the empirical material of this thesis, consists of articles from newspapers, collected and downloaded from the Internet, there may be difficult to find the exact same articles by using my keywords, due to the dynamic qualities of the web. Hopefully, this can be a bit easier by providing the URL's in the list of references. Chapter four of the thesis is a background chapter, which will describe the context on which the thesis is written. The intention of this chapter is to provide the reader with the same presumptions as me, before being exposed to the analysis.

## **3 Theory**

This chapter will present different views on which role the media could take in societies that undergo political transition processes. One theory that is related to this question is the public opinion theory presented by Noelle-Neumann (1981) on how public opinion is shaped by mass media. The reason for including this theory is that it can explain how the discussion about the Coptic situation in Egyptian media over a certain time period will have an effect on the population's public opinion on the role of the Copts in the Egyptian society, and thus their perception of the sectarian problem.

### **3.1 Media`s impact in political transition processes**

As claimed by Lance Bennett (1998), the impact of the media in the period before a regime is toppled, could be great, as long as it fulfills its witness and reifying/confirming role. But what impact does the media have in the period after a revolution, when the country finds itself in a phase of transition? Bennett (1998:196) claim that unregulated media in a newly democratizing context may be “more disruptive than productive in the formation of stable institutions and patterns of citizen participation”.

His argument supporting this assertion is mostly concerned with the condition of the civil society (Bennett 1998:198). Civil society can be defined as associations and other organized bodies that are intermediate between the state and the family. This can include social movements, religious bodies and the media. The effectiveness of the civil society, are related to societal factors that is connected to ethnic and religious diversity, which in turn, reflects the quantity of the social capital. Haynes defines social capital as the interpersonal trust, which makes it easier for people to do things together, neutralize free riders and agree on sanctions against non-performing governments. Especially one characteristic of social capital should be noted and that is

“bonded society”. This characteristic is the sense of common nationhood and cultural identity, which helps to focus group resources. Widespread societal hardship and social disintegration are some of the factors that are likely to undermine the social capital of a country (Haynes 2012:3-5).

Coming from an authoritarian regime, where the press and thus public opinion has been under pressure, the civil society lacks the social experiences to the new vocabulary of democracy. The absence of this experience undermines the capacity of the audience to convert communication content into stable political identifications and beliefs. A new democratic discourse cannot be thoroughly deliberated by the people, because of a weak civil society, a lack of social forums and familiar public institutions. Not being able to thoroughly deliberate the new democratic discourse will raise the expectations of the people about both the pace of change and the ability of the interim or new government to deliver the promised rewards that motivated the revolution in the first place (Bennett 1998:198-201).

As can be seen by this argumentation, the media does have an important role in a transition process, and if it is not part of a somehow strong civil society, Bennett claim that one should be cautious in liberalizing the media institutions in the direct aftermath of an authoritarian regime. There exists no simple theory that can universally explain how the media should function in political transition processes. Patrick O’Neil (1998:7) says that how mass communication contributes to a process of transition depends on the form and function of the media in a given society, shaped by cultural, socioeconomic and political factors. He lists three points that can provide us with some tools to analyze what starting point the Egyptian media has when facing the transition process after the revolution.

### *Types of mass communication*

How the information is disseminated affects media’s role in the transition process. One of the first questions one need to ask concerning this is about the literacy rate in the country. If there is a high rate of illiteracy, print media are naturally likely to play

a restricted role (O'Neil 1998:8). Another important factor related to the dissemination of information is how the ability of the state to direct the news in any way, develops during the revolution process. The ability of authoritarian regimes to direct news is already in a decline because of the increasingly global nature of electronic communication. The printed media may be easier to control, but if the pressure from different newspapers gets too tough in a time of crisis, the limitations for the regime's possibility to impact the editors, will increase. As supported by Noah Rayman's (2013) study of the Egyptian press during and after the Arab Spring, the print media may be vital in times of crisis or liberalization. The printed word can be helpful during and before a revolution, in broadening public discourse, opening and sometimes reopening subjects previously considered taboo, providing an outlet for opposition views, and thus furthering the erosion of authoritarian control (O'Neil 1998:9).

#### *Degree and form of state control*

The easiest way to think of this is the level of censorship the authoritarian system puts on the media. To what extent can the media express alternative viewpoints and critical discourse? O'Neil (1998:9) presents two forms of censorship, pre- and postcensorship. When precensorship are conducted by an authoritarian regime the goal is to stifle all form of criticism by closing publications, restricting public access to electronic communication and centralizing the news services in order to get an oversight. Postcensorship is conducted when the authorities either lack the power or the interest to directly control the media, and thus rely on a system of threats and harassment ranging from economic sanctions to revocation of licenses, towards publications after publishing. This approach relays on the media controlling itself because of the fear of the repercussions from the regime if they do not.

#### *Market, property and the locus of media authority*

Within this factor, ownership of the media is critical. If the regime has monopoly over the media, it has created a dependent relationship. This will have an impact on the public in terms of what information they are served, but also for the journalists in

terms of livelihood. But the media does not have to be all centralized by the regime to experience that its power is limited. This is especially true in authoritarian regimes that often can be described by corruption and questionable relationships. Private ownership of a media institution, does not necessarily guarantee their autonomy from the regime. The owners may be state-run or allied with an economic elite, which thus make it susceptible to influence by the regime (O'Neil 1998:10).

These three factors will be considered in the light of the Egyptian context in the next chapter. The next section will proceed to present some views on the media's impact on polarization in ethnically or religiously divided societies.

## **3.2 Media and polarization in divided societies**

One important approach to the study on media influence is Gerbner's (1969, 1973 in Lubbers, Scheepers, and Vergeer 2000:129) theory of cultural indicators. He uses cultivation theory and presents a hypothesis that says that "exposure influences people to perceive the world in a certain manner". This hypothesis was based on a study of people's exposure to television, and Lubbers, Scheepers and Vergeer (2000) tries to build on Gerbner's theory by including people's exposure to newspapers as well. They want to study if exposure to newspaper content concerned with ethnic minority issues has an impact on people's perception of how threatening ethnic minorities are. Their hypothesis is therefore that the more exposure one has to negative media coverage about ethnic minorities, the more one perceive ethnic minorities as a threat. Presuming that the two hypotheses presented in these two studies is correct, one can assume that if the Egyptian media coverage of Coptic issues has a sectarian and polarized notion, this will have grave consequences for their situation in the time to come, and thus for the transition process in the country.

The findings from the second study support Gerbner's cultivation theory in some way, but it also provides some remarkable results that cast doubts upon his hypothesis. One of these results is that people that are exposed to several newspapers perceive ethnic

minorities as less threatening, which is the opposite of what Gerbner's hypothesis claim. They conclude by saying that a possible explanation to this finding is that exposure to a larger number of different opinions about ethnic minorities as articulated in different newspapers, leads to a more sophisticated attitude than does just being exposed to the messages of a single newspaper (Lubbers, Scheepers and Vergeer 2000:140).

These findings may support a view that media does not necessarily has to hinder a transition process. A flourishing media environment, which one could claim has erupted in Egypt after the revolution, can in fact support and promote a transition towards democracy in the way that they expose people to different opinions about the social conditions in the country, which in turn helps provide a fruitful public discussion about Coptic issues and the problem of sectarianism.

### **3.3 Media and public opinion**

It is interesting to study Noelle-Neumann's theory on mass media's effect on public opinion, because it can tell us something about the impact the Egyptian press and its coverage of Coptic issues has on the Egyptian public's perception of the Coptic community.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1981:139) writes about the interaction between the individual and the environment, and terms this interaction process the "spiral of silence". This process is the foundation of public opinion theory, and Noelle-Neumann argues that the "spiral of silence" can explain why some opinions are dominating while other fall silent. By nature, people live in fear of isolating themselves and therefore they carefully observe the environment to see which opinions increase and which ones decrease. By doing this, they can see whether their own views predominate or increase, or whether their views are decreasing in the public sphere. If they find that their views are present and dominating in public, they express themselves freely, but if they find that their views are decreasing and losing

supporters, they become fearful, conceal their convictions in public, and fall silent. As a result of this process one group express their views with self-confidence in public, whereas the other remain silent. The prevailing opinion thus confronts the individual frequently, while the other is heard less and less. Individuals perceive these tendencies and adapt their views according to it, thus making one opinion dominate while the other is downgraded. Thus the tendency of one speaking up and the other to falling silent starts off a spiraling process, which increasingly establishes one opinion as the prevailing one (Noelle-Neumann 1974:44).

This theory has an absolute relevance to the Egyptian case. As the theory states, if the prevailing view on Copts in the Egyptian press are negative, sectarian and polarized – the audience will eventually adopt the same view. But if the view on Copts is neutral or positive, this view will prevail. People with extreme or very opposing views contrary to that exposed in public, will most likely hold their thoughts to themselves or turn to “niche” media. This will also be relevant for people's understanding of the sectarian problem. One can expect, that if the sectarian problem is discussed as a problem that may hinder the transition process after the revolution, this will in the end be the prevailing public opinion and thus may lead to demands among the people about the need to resolve this problem in order to secure the transitioning process.

One thing one has to take into consideration when studying the impact of mass media, is that the arguments presented above can be threatened by what is called selective, supporting perception. Selective, supporting perception is a defensive mechanism that can be used by people to protect themselves against the change of their own attitudes. This is done, by actively selecting which media to absorb and which ones to avoid. This approach to media may be easier when facing print media, because one actively has to purchase or come into possession of the media, but it has become more difficult with the increase in television and electronic communication (Noelle-Neumann 1981:153-154).



Since Noelle-Neumann presented her public opinion theory in 1974, there have been great developments in the media field. The public opinion theory is interesting, but it can no longer give us the whole picture of what forms public opinion, because of the emergence of the internet and new social media's, like Facebook and Twitter, exposing people to a wide range of opinions on a daily basis. Thus, the theory can give us a few pointers to the public opinion prevailing among Egyptians, but it cannot be accurate because of the new technology, exposing people to a huge amount of information every minute of the day.

### **3.4 Media's three roles in a democracy**

If the Egyptian transition to democracy is to succeed, social institutions like the press will have to embrace their democratic responsibilities. There are at least three important roles for the media in a democratization process and in democratic societies: the role as watchdog, an agenda-setter, and as the gatekeeper. These three can be used as a reference for how the Egyptian media ideally should function in a new and liberalized Egyptian environment.

The role of the *watchdog* refers to media's responsibility to provide checks and balances on powerful sectors of the society, and through that help to guard public interests (Norris and Odugbemi 2010 in Plăeșu et al. 2011:494-495). Serving the role of the watchdog, media should monitor the full range of state activity, and expose abuses of official authority without fearing the consequences of doing so (Curran 2005:122). Ideally, the media should not only provide a link between the government and the governed but also impart information that can constrain the centralization of power and the obfuscation of illicit or unethical state action (O'Neil 1998:2).

As an *agenda-setter* the media should serve as an agency of information and debate. Within this role lays an especially important responsibility and that is to raise awareness of pervasive social problems. Social problems needs to be debated, in order for people to identify the problems, propose solutions and reach a consensus. Media is

an excellent arena for such debates. Another important aspect of this role is to make sure that everyone has the right to express their opinion, and thus ensure that all significant points of view are aired (Curran 2005:129). O'Neil (1998:2) states that through this role, the media have a powerful ability to shape the perceptions of society. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann claims that arguments that are emphasized in the media, gains ground in the population within half a year, while those arguments that are not emphasized lose ground. This can be understood as how the normal agenda-setting function of the mass media works: by determining where the main difficulties of an unsatisfactory situation must be seen and, derived from that, priorities of political action (Noelle-Neumann 1981:153-154). These arguments emphasize how the mass media can have a very important influence on both forming the public opinion but also choosing which issues that needs to be prioritized by the political actors.

The functions of the different democratic roles tend to overlap a bit, which can be seen in the last role of the media, the *gate-keeping* role. The main responsibility of the media is here to reflect and incorporate the plurality of the people and political persuasions in reporting (Norris and Odugbemi 2010 in Plăeșu et al. 2011:495). Curran (2005:131) says that this can be seen as representing the people to authority. After having briefed the people and staged a debate about important problems in the society, media's role is to present their views and interests to government.

Media must be aware of the influence they have over the perceptions in society, and must complement their role with caution. This is especially important in divided societies, like Egypt. Having the role as gatekeepers of information and agenda-setters, the media has to be involved in arbitrating between the discursive frameworks of rival groups. The inclusion or exclusion of different frameworks can affect the collective opinion, and thus the distribution of resources and life chances in society (Curran 2005:137).

## **4 Background**

This part of the thesis will seek to provide some background information about the role of the Christian community in Egypt, throughout the history. Their role is of course influenced by what stance the Egyptian regime takes towards the group. Peter E. Makari (2007:60-64) has presented five schools of civilization-historic identification that the regime can take when forming their policy. Depending on which of the schools the regime has identified with, its policies have influenced the Egyptian society, and had ramifications for the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. The following section will briefly present the policy of the three presidents from Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak and try to relate their presidencies to some of the schools presented by Makari.

### **4.1 The development of the situation for the Coptic community, from Nasser to Mubarak**

The history of the Christians of Egypt has not always been one of victimization and marginalization. In the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, the Egyptian Christians were at the forefront of the renaissance Egypt experienced at that time. The Christian Takla family founded the newspaper Al Ahram, Christians were among the leading figures that founded today's Cairo University, and they were heavily involved in introducing the first banking, translation and automated manufacturing facilities in the country (Osman 2010:144-145). Their role in Egypt deteriorated during the last half of the twentieth century, and this next section will try to give a description and explanation of the factors that led to their decreasing influence in the Egyptian society.

#### **4.1.1 Nasser**

Gamal Abdel Nasser gained the power of Egypt after a military coup in July 1952. In the proceeding years he undertook a development program, which would significantly transform the Egyptian society. The transformation process consisted of several elements, and the two that had the greatest influence on the Egyptian Christians were the ones related to the transformation of the national economy. One of the first things Nasser did was to undertake a dramatic reform of the unequal pattern of landownership. In 1950, 0.5 per cent of Egyptians owned more than one-third of all fertile land, while another third was shared among 95 per cent of mostly poor farmers (Al-Desoky 2007 in Osman 2010:45). By enforcing a 100-acre ceiling on the size of any family's holding, Nasser transformed the feudal system into one based on "equity and progress". The second pillar of his economic transformation process was changing the public sector. During a few years he nationalized almost all of Egypt's sizeable businesses, with the goal stemming from the same underlying philosophy: "to remodel the structure of wealth by transferring ownership from a narrow capitalist class... to millions of ordinary employees, poor laborers and struggling workers" (Osman 2010:46).

After the hits from the economic transformation processes conducted by Nasser, Christians had lost a huge part of their source for prosperity, as well as their ground in the public sector. They felt too detached and westernized to start afresh in this new and changing Egypt (Osman 2010:151). As a result Egyptian Christians started to emigrate from the country.

Even though Nasser's project had a devastating effect on Christians economical role in Egypt, he pursued a policy, which could provide a greater impact on their social role in the society, with an inclusive and "national" appeal. This appeal considered the fact that the Christians had played an historic role in the region. Nasser emphasized Islam, as a civilization, rather than Islam as a government, political movement or governing framework, and this endeared him to Christians without antagonizing the majority of Muslims (Osman 2010:51-53). Nasser's project and ideology can be said to be covered by two of the schools presented by Makari (2007). The first school is

named “The Egyptian Identity”. The core idea of this school is the uniqueness of Egypt as a nation, with a long history. By emphasizing the country’s historical roots the regime could solidify a national identity. With the focus being on seeing all Egyptians as descendants of ancient Egypt, it is a very inclusive school that draws both Muslims and Christians to it (Makari 2007:60-61).

This school is especially relevant in the first years of Nasser’s reign. One may also argue that Nasser’s ideology can be placed in Makari’s fourth school, named “The Arab School”. This school focus is on the years after the Arab conquest in 642 and emphasizes the cultural and religious links to its Arab neighbors, and can therefore be seen as opposed to the local identification evident in “The Egyptian Identity” school (Makari 2007:62). In the post-Suez decade Nasser established Egypt as the Arab world’s centre of political gravity.

The focus on immersing Egypt, politically and culturally in the Arab world, entailed a thorough redirection of society towards the Islamic culture that had ruled the Arabs’ historical heartland for fourteen centuries. This factor had a considerable impact on Christian’s withdrawal from the Egyptian society. The process of “Arabization” that was started under Nasser’s presidential period was developed into a process of “Islamization” during Sadat’s presidency.

#### **4.1.2 Sadat**

Anwar Sadat continued the processes of transforming the country, but his approach differed from his predecessor. Among the changes he undertook was an abolishment of the socialist ideology after Nasser, an alteration of Egypt’s strategic orientation from its Arab neighbors to a closer relationship with USA and he altered the relationship with the people of Egypt. This relationship used to be grounded in a bottom-up legitimacy based on the masses’ consent, but Sadat changed it to a top-down imposition of power (Osman 2010:70).

Another important change, that eventually would have an impact on the Copts role in Egypt, was a closer link with the conservative Saudi-Arabia, which led to the ascendance of a new religiosity in Egypt from the 1970s. There is especially two factors that contributed to making Egypt a fertile ground for the Saudi-led Wahhabi project: First, Egyptians migrating to the Gulf between 1974 and 1985, absorbing the cultures of their new home and brought the legacies of this form of Islam back to Egypt with them. The second factor is based on the politics of the 1970s. In order to halt the socialist forces in Egypt, Sadat released Islamists from prison, and declared Sharia law as the principal source of legislation for the Egyptian constitution (Osman 2007:78-81).

The policies of Sadat had severe consequences for the Coptic population. With the rise of a conservative religiosity and the regime turning more and more towards Islam, the Christians became undermined in the country (Osman 2010:82). The regime promoted an exclusive vision of religion, one rooted in Islam, not Arab (or secular nationalism). By embracing an Islamic vision of the Egyptian nation, the political and religious elites undermined traditional conceptions of religious tolerance, and with it, the corresponding rights to participation and equal citizenship (Hibbard 2011:86).

The deterioration of the situation for the Christian community can clearly be seen in the period of Sadat's presidency. Egypt witnessed cycles of violent sectarianism, and Christians became positioned as a victimized minority. There was a widespread feeling of a society that grew increasingly more "Islamic", which could be seen, not only in politics, "but in social attitudes, behaviors, even discourse". And though there was no systematic discrimination against the Coptic population, there were numerous cases of unfairness in daily life (Osman 2010:156).

Sadat's policy can be categorized in the last school Makari presents, "Islam". This school differs from the Arab school because of its emphasis and centrality of religion instead of culture and language. One of the claims of this school is that with a predominant number of Muslim citizens, Egypt is a Muslim country and should be

ruled as such. This means implementing Sharia, which would give non-Muslims of the country a second-class citizenship status. By implementing Sharia as the principal source of legislation, Sadat undermined the religious minorities living in the country, by forcing them to follow the religious laws of Islam. Makari states that the “Islam” school is the least liberal of the five he presents, and that it by nature can be said to be sectarian (Makari 2007:64).

### **4.1.3 Mubarak**

Stepping into office in 1981, Hosni Mubarak inherited a newly constructed multiparty arena that could potentially challenge the existence of the personal authoritarian system that had prevailed in Egypt for so long (Kassem 2004:26). To retain the authoritarian rule of the president, Mubarak chose different approaches during his presidency. In his first term in the 1980s, he undertook his presidential mission with considerable domestic success. He declared his love for democracy, removed a number of the controversial laws from Sadat, freed prisoners and relaxed the censorship of the press to some extent (Osman 2010:166).

But it soon became clear that Mubarak lacked a national project, which both of his predecessors had undertaken. The lack of political reform was evident, and the indolent pace of the economic development, with little tangible improvements for people’s living standard, made his style become associated with lethargy, stillness and lack of imagination (Osman 2010:168). The growing frustration in the people, made Mubarak turn to a different approach in order to keep his position safe. He actively used the emergency law that had been in force since the death of Sadat, to maintain political control. By strengthening the censorship over political activity ranging from the monitoring of political activity to limiting political expression, he suppressed oppositional factors that could eventually threaten his position (Kassem 2004:37). In the media and among the public it became commonly understood that criticism was allowed, but that it was limited, and the president and the military was off limits (Bradley 2008:204). His handling of the Christian community and the rising sectarian

problem shows how he officially declared that he would make changes, but in practice these commitments did not mean anything. The rise of Political Islam significantly radicalized large sections of ordinary people (Osman 2010:185), and in the efforts to appease Islamic conservatives and the rise of political Islam, state actors were tolerant towards abusive and discriminatory practices against Copts (Hibbard 2011:98).

Mubarak`s presidency and rule remained in the last school presented by Peter Makari, the school of “Islam”. He did not change the constitution, so Sharia remained the principal source of legislation. Scott Hibbard (2011:88) claims that Mubarak`s government continued to promote the illiberal vision of Islam in public life from Sadat`s era, which means that the political standing are related with ones membership in one faith community or another. This policy gives priority to the dominant religious or ethnic group at the expense of minorities. What emerged from this illiberal vision was an intolerant public sphere, where the persecution of Christians occurred without official opposition and often with its complicity (Hibbard 2011:94).

As can be seen by the sections above, the situation for the Copts deteriorated in Egypt after Nasser became president in 1952. There are several explanations to this, ranging from economical to ideological transformations. The resentment of the Egyptian regime to first, acknowledge that there is a sectarian problem in the country, and second, handle the problem in a correct manner has extended the problem. The next section will present the development of the situation for the Copts in the Egyptian media. First, there will be a brief presentation of the development of the Egyptian media scene, since Nasser, and then there will be a more thorough presentation of how Coptic issues has been handled in the media.

## **4.2 The development of the Egyptian media scene**

Before the revolution in 1952, there was a relatively free and diverse media environment in Egypt. The newspapers provided platforms for various writers and intellectuals, and more and more daily newspapers were introduced. Starting with the



presidential era of president Nasser this development turned, and limits were set for the expanding media landscape. What used to be a flourishing media scene soon was replaced by a restrictive media environment. All media fell under government supervision, ownership and control, and the newspapers that had been established during the pre-revolutionary era disappeared along with the journalists (Khamis 2011:1160).

The Egyptian media under Nasser, Sadat and the early period of Mubarak were for the most part under control of the ruling regime. Both Sadat and Mubarak allowed the publication of opposition papers, but their influence and circulation was highly dependent on the freedom of the opposition. During the last part of the presidency of Mubarak, one witnessed significant changes that were to have an effect on the Egyptian media landscape. These changes included among others, the emergence of media privatization, which meant the introduction of private satellite television channels, the spread of privately, owned opposition and independent newspapers, and growing Internet accessibility. The introduction of satellite television channels, and after a while growing accessibility to the Internet, offered the Egyptian audience an uncensored alternative to the otherwise government-owned and regulated media. Since the government hardly could have control over this distribution it represented an important shift to a more pluralistic and diverse media scene (Khamis 2011:1161).

### **4.3 Coptic issues in the Egyptian media**

Even though the media scene developed to become a bit more diverse and pluralistic, under Mubarak, the public debate over issues concerning Coptic Christians, their demands and the problem of sectarianism was either poorly represented or totally absent for a long time in the Egyptian media. This policy gradually changed from the middle of the 2000s. One specific event in Alexandria, were heavily involved in lifting the public taboo on the subject.

On April 14<sup>th</sup> 2006 a Muslim entered a church in Alexandria and stabbed three parishioners. He proceeded to attack worshippers in two other churches, before he was arrested on his way to a fourth church. On the funeral procession for one victim, the next day, clashes broke out again between Muslims and Christians, leaving one Muslim dead and several injured. The following day, street fighting erupted once again after Christians marched down one of the main streets in Alexandria, shouting Christian slogans. El Amrani (2006) says that these three days of violence lifted a taboo on the public debate over the state of relations between Muslims and the minority Coptic Christians in Egypt. Previously, government officials and the media had brushed sectarian violence off by repeating that the incidents were exception to a rule of “national unity” and inter-communal brotherhood, and often explained the violence as the work of individuals, madmen or extremists.

The sudden lift on the taboo in public debate can be said to result from a development that emerged during 2005. This year, Egypt witnessed a period of political liberalization in the run-up to what would be the least-manipulated legislative elections in the country’s recent history and its first multi-candidate presidential elections. Even though the political landscape of Egypt soon turned back to “normal”, one legacy of the abortive liberalization period remained: a more independent, diversified and critical press, which had gradually been developing since the late 1990s. A remarkable side effect of the gradual deregulation of the Egyptian press was the transformation of Coptic issues, from a virtual public taboo into one of the favorite subjects of the daily and weekly press (Elsässer 2010:131). Before 2006, most of the media rarely gave room to Coptic claims of discrimination. But the events in Alexandria, led to a new reality in the press. While political leaders still spoke of “national unity”, editorialists and other personalities were increasingly willing to speak of a problem in sectarian relations and the legitimacy of at least some Coptic demands (El Amrani 2006).

Although there were few articles about sectarian clashes in the press before 2006, the media itself was sometimes involved in stirring up the tension between the two

groups. El Amrani (2006) shows an example of this from October 2005 when there was a media campaign directed against the Coptic Church. The focus of the controversy was a video recording of a Coptic play, which featured a young Copt who is persuaded by Muslim fundamentalists to convert to Islam. Once he converts, he sees the moral error of their ways and returns to the church. This video was published in a district of Alexandria where a Copt had beaten out several Muslims to become the official candidate for the National Democratic Party. A refusal from the Church to apologize for the leak of this video led to Muslim protests.

As can be seen from the development in the media environment presented above, a huge part of the press has been under government control for at least 50 years. This of course had a serious impact on whose stances and positions would be published, how thorough articles about sensitive issues would be and which stories that were to be told. Reporters without borders present a yearly press freedom index, where they measure the degrees of freedom enjoyed by the media in over 170 countries. The index from 2010 says that Egypt is ranked as number 127, and that it is a country with a difficult situation when it comes to press freedom (Reporters Without Borders 2011). In the index measuring the countries in 2011, Egypt suffers a dramatic fall on the lists, down 33 places to a ranking at 166. This dramatic fall is a result of the aftermath of the toppling of president Mubarak in February 2011. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)<sup>6</sup> continued with the practices from Mubarak's dictatorship, and the country experienced three periods of exceptional violence directed against journalists in February, November and December (Reporters Without Borders 2012).

What can be drawn from this, at this point, is that the media environment not necessarily has become much freer since the toppling of the authoritarian leaders that ruled Egypt for the past 60 years. But there has been an opening in the public debate, where Coptic issues has proved to be a viable theme that consists to appear in the opinion columns. What is interesting for this thesis is whether the Egyptian media

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presents the Coptic issues in a neutral way or if the coverage are polarizing and sectarian. As can be seen by the example of the Coptic play distributed above, the media can have a polarizing effect on the society. This is especially true in ethnically diverse communities where the media often can serve to reinforce existing differences, through for instance use of language, and thus accelerate a disintegrating effect on an already homogeneous population (Reljic 2000 in Marin and Lengel 2007:57-58). But the increasingly openness in the public debate about Coptic issues after 2006, can indicate an effort by the media to combat ethnic tension, and instead increase cultural sensitivity and awareness in the country.

#### **4.4 The Egyptian context after the revolution**

Before moving on to the analysis of the three main “Coptic” discussions in the Egyptian media after the revolution, I want to return to the three factors presented by Patrick O’Neil: *types of communication, degree and form of state control and market, property and the locus of media authority*. He states that a new media system should consider both the system that has preceded it and the dynamics of the present domestic context in order to choose a system that fits the new context (O’Neil 1998:11). There is a need to see these three factors in context of the Egyptian case, to get an assumption on how the Egyptian media can contribute to the political transition process in the country.

##### *Types of communication*

This factor was concerned with how the information provided by the media was disseminated. The first thing one can look at is the literacy rates among the Egyptian public. This is important, because if a great deal of the people cannot read, the printed media will have limited influence. The World Factbook (2010) defines literacy as: people from age 10 and over knows how to read and write. Estimates from 2010 show that the literacy rates for the Egyptian population is 72%. This number is considered high enough to suggest that the print media in Egypt can have an impact on the society.

Another question related to the dissemination of information is if the state has any ability to direct the news in any way, and if this develops throughout the revolution process. As supported by Rayman's (2013) study of the Egyptian press during and after the Arab Spring, the printed word can be helpful in and before a revolution, in broadening public discourse, opening and sometimes reopening subjects previously considered taboo, providing an outlet for opposition views, and thus furthering the erosion of authoritarian control (O'Neil 1998:9). The ability of the Egyptian state to direct the news in one way or another decreased during the revolution, as shown in an example under the next factor, degree and form of state control.

#### *Degree and form of state control*

This factor is related to how and to which degree the state had control over the media, in form of censorship. One can argue that the regime in Egypt has used both pre- and postcensorship. The state owned media, has suffered from precensorship, in the way that the government itself has chosen the editor-in-chief, and have set clear restrictions on which issues one can write about, and which issues that are taboo. The independent media that has grown in Egypt since the end of the 1990s, has experienced more of the postcensorship that O'Neil describes. Of course, they have the same notion of which issues that can be covered, and which issues that are taboo, but they do not have employees directly appointed by the government, and thus the regime cannot have fully control of what is written until it is published. Rayman (2013) writes about a situation he was told about from the editorial team in Egypt Independent. At the beginning of the revolution, the editors had a discussion about how they should cover the first demonstrations that occurred. They told Rayman that this was a discussion about whether or not the paper would survive the next weeks.

*They knew that if they reported objectively on the demonstrations of that afternoon, the President, State Security Minister, or Information Minister would be calling the next day. And even if the caller did not revoke the newspaper's publishing license on the spot, he would explain that the*

*newspaper's future was in question. It was not hard to predict that government-run newspapers would downplay the size of the protests—certainly placing coverage below the fold—and objective reporting of any sort would be unlikely.*

(Rayman 2013:2)

This is a good example of how the regime usually conducted the policy of postcensorship towards independent newspapers in the country. Egypt Independent ended up deciding that they should take the risk, and received a phone call the next day from the Minister of Interior, saying that if they dealt with the president, they was on their own. In normal circumstances, this would have meant that the papers license would be revoked, but as the revolution continued the authorities grew weaker and lost the ability to deal with the newspapers that had broken previously stated taboos.

#### *Market, property and the locus of media authority*

This factor was mostly concerned with the ownership of the media, and how this ownership affected media's autonomy from the state. In the Egyptian press, and in the data material of this thesis, there are newspapers, which one would expect to have different degrees of autonomy from the state. For example, one might presume the independent newspapers to be the ones that best would be able to exercise its democratic functions, but that does not necessarily have to be the case. As stated by O'Neil, press with private ownership may be allied with an economic elite or with the state, which in turn may make it susceptible to influence by the regime. In the summer of 2011, Mona El Shayeb, a news anchor at Nile News TV station said: "The revolution generated hope in changing our editorial policy but months later, there is no real change". A campaign launched by the news channel said that Egyptian media still were subject to pressure from the regime, concerning coverage of special events, often related to sectarian violence. This may seem like a negative picture of the development of the media field after the revolution, but Sameh Ragaey, which is the acting deputy for this TV station, stated that there had been a severe change in the

editorial policy, in the way that different opinions were presented more actively now, than before the revolution (Daily News Egypt 2011e).

Media's dependency on the state, influence the information that is served the public. After a sectarian strife in October 2011, experts held state media accountable for misinformation, blaming them for inciting sectarianism. The former chief of Al Jazeera Cairo bureau, Hussein Abdel Ghani, stated that: "the Egyptian media has been the reason behind ignorance, racism and discrimination. It helped bring Egyptians to what they are now". This remains from Mubarak's presidency, which Abdel Ghani claim mislead the public by ensuring that the media presented information which would be beneficial for them, instead of securing a free flow of information (Al Desoukie 2011).

State media has for decades been under the control of the Ministry of Information in Egypt. This ministry was abolished during February 2011. But in July the same year, Field Marshal Tantawi<sup>7</sup> reinstated the ministry, and Osama Heikal was sworn in, as the new Information Minister. He was given the task of "reorganizing the Egyptian media". The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) claimed that this reinstatement came at a critical juncture in time, as the SCAF and other organs of the state in the preceding months had censored media and harassed journalists in an effort to intimidate them from critical reporting (CPJ 2011).

Change does not happen over night, and the transformation of the media environment in Egypt will proceed for years to come. The inclusion of different opinions in the media debate is positive, while the reinstatement of the Ministry of Information can lead to biased information, in favour of the regime, to the public, at least from the media that is under direct state control. But as also can be seen by some of the examples presented above the ability of the Egyptian state to direct the news in one way or another decreased during the revolution.

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<sup>7</sup> Field Marshal Tantawi is the head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

In the following sections, two of the major sectarian clashes happening in 2011 will be presented. These two clashes contributed to the emergence of the discussions presented in the analytical chapter.

#### **4.4.1 Imbaba, 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2011**

On May 7<sup>th</sup> 2011, violence erupted outside of the Marmina church in the Imbaba district, in Cairo, after rumors emerged that a Coptic woman was being held captive inside the church, because she wanted to convert to Islam. This rumor emerged after several weeks of tension between Christians and conservative Muslim groups, known as Salafis, concerned with a similar case where the Coptic Church allegedly held a woman captive because she had left her husband and converted to Islam. Saturday, May 7<sup>th</sup> 2011 the new rumor of a woman being held by the Church, made a group of Muslims gather outside the church in protest. There are different reports of how the protests turned violent, but some say people from neighboring houses started shooting into the crowds surrounding the church. In the violence that erupted the crowds turned to gun fighting, Molotov cocktails and stones, leaving at least 12 dead (both Christians and Muslims) and scores were injured (Al Ahram Online 2011a; El Elyan 2011a). In addition to the clashes outside of the Marmina church, a group went on to another church in the district and set that on fire as well.

#### **4.4.2 Maspero, 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2011**

In October, several Coptic groups announced that they would stage a march, protesting a recent attack on a church in Aswan, as well as demanding equal rights for Copts. The march was to start in the Shubra village in Cairo and end at Maspero, which is an area outside of the state TV-building. Army forces stopped the first march that was planned, before it reached the Maspero area. So the groups planned a second march, to protest both the events in Aswan, citizenship rights for Copts and the recent protest that was stopped.



There are different versions of how the second march turned violent, but several Egyptian media says that unidentified assailants first attacked the protesters with rocks, when they reached the Shubra tunnel. After these violent clashes the march continued to the Maspero area, where the army met the protesters. The march then erupted into a violent battle between the protesters and the Egyptian army. Video footage and eyewitnesses reports that the army used armoured personnel carriers to run over the crowds, as well as live ammunition towards the peaceful protesters, leaving more than 20 dead and hundreds injured (Rashwan 2011, Fahmy 2011b). In the aftermath of this event, state TV was accused of sectarian incitement by stating on air that the military was under attack by angry, armed Copts and that the people of Egypt needed to go out on the streets and protect their military from the violence.

SCAF soon decided that they should lead the investigations of the events, and that those detained should be tried before the military court. This decision led to reactions from both internal forces in Egypt as well as external human rights organizations, like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, who argued that an independent group should investigate the Maspero events, since the military themselves was involved.

# 5 Analysis

## 5.1 The discussion on citizenship

Emad Gad (2011a) defines citizenship as “full and equal membership in society, in terms of rights and duties”. According to this definition, citizenship means complete equality among society with regards to rights and responsibility, beyond just constitutional and legal regulations, Gad adds.

One of the main discussions related to equal rights in the Egyptian society, is concerned with freedom of religion and in turn, the right to build places of worship. The practice when it comes to building places of worship has been discriminatory. Christians face a long and bureaucratic struggle when they attempt to get licenses and the right documentation in order to build new or renovate existing church buildings. This has been a prevailing issue in the Egyptian press for a long time and especially after Prime Minister Sharaf promised to implement a unified law after the Imbaba clashes that occurred in May 2011. A draft law on places of worship was presented during the summer of 2011, but both Muslim and Christian leaders had several objections to the draft. The Coptic Church stated that one of the articles in the draft law disregarded the legitimacy of the judiciary, and thus the right to resort to the judicial system in case a permit to build a church was rejected by the administrative body. The Church claimed that the law instead, should have guaranteed the right to appeal to another court if the Administrative Court rejected the building permit. The reactions from the Muslim community also came swiftly, the draft law made 15 Islamist lawyers file a complaint against Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, saying that the amendments in the law would violate Muslims’ right to build mosques (Daily News Egypt 2011d).

Another objection to the draft law was the requirement of the worship houses to be of a minimum size. The draft law claimed that all worship places should be at least 1000

square meters. The Church wanted to decrease the required size to only 200 square meters, and was supported by Ishak Ibrahim, researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), that argued that “building a church 1000 meters in size in a village with a small Coptic community you will simply inflame the Muslims in the village” (Osman 2011b).

The discussion in the media was not only concerned with a unified law on places of worship, in fact, many claimed that implementing this law would not help solve the underlying causes to the sectarian problem. Emad Gad (2011c) states that Egypt’s problem is rooted in the overlap between religion, society and politics, and that it is important that values of citizenship is addressed both in the educational curricula and in the media, two domains where the values of equal rights and citizenship has been undermined and limited. The need to go deeper into the roots of the sectarian problem is clearly illustrated in the example from the attack against an Aswan church in September 2011. Both the state, the media and religious sources can be said to have blame in these events, and therefore one need to take a closer look at these institutions in order to try to solve the problem. These institutions have to embrace the desired values that one want to build the new state upon, which is something that a lot of the writers in the press seem to be concerned about. The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gomaa, wrote in an article published in Daily News Egypt that he “call upon the Egyptian and international media to take part in promoting a sectarian-free Egypt. I call upon the educationists to review the school curricula to make sure they are free from sectarian biases and stereotypes” (Gomaa 2011).

The incident that happened in the governorate of Aswan can be used to describe how the issue with places of worship can turn sectarian. On 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011, the Marinab church in Aswan was attacked by a group of Muslims after allegations that Christians in the village had started to renovate the existing church without having the right documentation. These allegations made a group of “unidentified” Muslims, who according to sources was, encouraged by some local clerics to attack the building and set it on fire. The church was partly burnt down, together with some Coptic houses in

the neighborhood of the village. After the attack, the governor of Aswan, Moustafa El Sayed, said on television that the Copts in the village had attempted to rebuild the church without the necessary planning permit and that they had themselves to blame for not being able to provide the necessary paper work to document their building licenses. Pope Shenouda 3<sup>rd</sup>, the head of the Coptic Church, later submitted the requested paperwork to the ruling military council and the Cabinet, thereby proving that the Copts in the village had been allowed to restore the Church.

This example show how important it is to address underlying causes for the sectarian problem, as stated by Gad and Sheikh Gomaa. First, the governor of Aswan, a representative of the official government, blamed the Copts, saying that they themselves had spurred the events because they tried to renovate and build a church illegally. He also stated that they had violated the building codes by raising the building four meters higher than the nine meters maximum that building code permits allows (El Gergawi 2011). Second, local clerics were by different sources accused to have told Muslims to go to the church “and finish the job themselves” (Daily News Egypt 2011g).

## **5.2 The discussion on the role of the Coptic Church in the Egyptian society**

This discussion is concerned with the political role of the Coptic Church in the Egyptian society. The former<sup>8</sup> head of the Church, Pope Shenouda 3<sup>rd</sup>, embraced the institutions role as both the political and media spokesman for the Coptic community before the January 25 revolution, but this role changed after the revolts, where Copts disobeyed the Church’s sayings by taking part in the demonstrations. Many of the contributing writers in this debate warn about a development where the new regime in Egypt maintains the policies of the old regime, making the Coptic Church the main representative of the Coptic community. Daily News Egypt (2011f) describes a debate

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Shenouda 3rd died on March 17th 2012.

that occurred after Prime Minister Essam Sharaf met with the Coptic Pope to discuss Coptic grievances after the revolution. Coptic commentators described these meetings as “positive”, but stated that the government of Egypt should tackle Coptic issues, as part of a problem of the Egyptian people, separating them from the Church. With the Egyptian regime going through the Church to discuss Coptic issues, they promote a view of the Church as the main representative for the Copts, while at the same time personifying the community in the Pope’s character, thus marginalizing them politically and socially.

The revolution in Egypt, led to great changes for the Coptic community, one as stated was that Copts themselves took to the streets to protest. Before the revolution, the Coptic community had mostly demonstrated for their rights inside of the churches, trusting the Church to deliver their demands to the state. But as they saw that this formula failed them by not leading to any noticeable changes, they moved their protests out on the streets (Gad 2011a). Hossam Tama was quoted in an article saying:

*We are now witnessing a deep shift in the status of Copts in society. The shift is from the failed policy of guardianship applied by the former regime to a democratic system in which Copts are pursuing their own political agendas without heavy interference from the church.*

(Osman 2011a).

The Copts pursuing their own political agenda, without interference from the Church, also meant that the Coptic community started to raise demands towards the Church. One of the most common claims raised by Copts during 2011, was the demand for an amendment of the Christian personal status law. The conflict over this law concerns an amendment made by Pope Shenouda in the 1970s. Originally the law stated fifteen justifications for divorce, but the amendment made by the Coptic Church reduced these to one: adultery. For the national court to apply this law the People Assembly needs to pass this amendment but it has never been discussed in the Assembly. Thus, the state sees the original law as valid, while the Church refuses to accept this law,

and use the amended law in their policy. A problem with the amended personal status law is that Copts who decide they want a divorce, based on another reason than adultery, loses their right to remarry within the Church. The intransigent position the Church takes towards divorce, causes many Copts to either convert to Islam or another Christian denomination in order to obtain a divorce (Scott 2010:171-172). The refusal of the Church to handle this issue with the personal status law, made 130 Copts abandon the Church in September 2011 (Daily News Egypt 2011a).

The conservative stance the Church has taken on this issue has led many Christians to convert to Islam, in order to get a divorce and have the possibility of remarriage. This development has spurred a growing suspicion among the Christian and Muslim communities, a suspicion that makes Muslims paranoid with a theory stating that Copts stockpile weapons inside of their churches and kidnap Muslim converts, while Copts are paranoid with unverified ideas that Muslims kidnap underage Coptic woman and force them to convert (Egypt Independent 2011d).

Suspicious like these have caused several sectarian outbreaks of violence in Egypt since the revolution, like the one erupting in the Imbaba neighborhood in May 2011.

### **5.3 The discussion on law enforcement**

This discussion is concerned with the importance of prosecuting perpetrators of sectarian events. Joe Stark, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, talks for many of the journalists and writers that have participated in this debate when he says that: “Putting an end to sectarian violence means prosecuting those responsible and making sure that the outcome is fair” (Al Ahram Online 2012a). Mohamed Hassanein Heikal (2011) writes in Al Ahram Online that implementing the law, and ensuring respect for it, is especially important in a state of transition, because it is this phase that lays the foundation for what comes next.

Emad Gad (2011b) warns about maintaining the policy of the previous regime, in the “new” Egypt. Gad says that during Mubarak’s presidency, the regime undertook a structured plan to ensure that no perpetrators of sectarian crimes were penalised. First, one applied a principle of calling the events an “open crime”, stating that it was impossible to determine who killed whom and therefore no one could be penalised. One can argue that this strategy can be seen in relation with the Imbaba events, where different sources provided different stories of the events, thus making it difficult to conclude who was to blame for the eruption into violence.

Second, the regime often questioned the sanity of the perpetrator and claimed that he was mentally unstable. An example of this strategy can be seen in the aftermath of a train shooting in Samalout, where a man dressed as a police officer killed one Copt and injured several other Christians. A security officer told investigators that the events were not religiously motivated and that it had to do with the perpetrators “personal mental state” (Al Ahram Online 2011b).

If the first two strategies failed, the regime usually resorted to traditional reconciliation meetings where the aim was to prevent the use of civil law against the perpetrators. These meetings are seen as an alternative to the justice system, instead of a supplement, and it often involves the victims withdrawing any complaint, thereby assuring the assailants that if they repeat their actions, they will not face criminal charges (EIPR 2010). The use of reconciliation meetings have been upheld in Morsi’s regime, and one example of how these meetings can have a discriminatory and disruptive effect, is from a case that happened in the town of Amreya in March 2012. A sex video of a Christian man and a Muslim woman began to circulate, causing angry residents of the village to protest and set fire to businesses belonging to the Christian family allegedly involved. None of the attackers were prosecuted instead it was decided through a reconciliation meeting that the Christian family should leave the town, with no one ensuring that the family safely could return, when the situation had calmed down. Ishak Ibrahim, EIPR, says that the problem with reconciliation meetings is “that the outcomes are not consistent. It also means that Christians or the

side that is weaker will be at a disadvantage, and so this effect all Egyptians” (Batrawy 2012).

An important part of the discussion on law enforcement is to ensure that civilians are tried before civil courts and subjected to fair trials. The use of the state of emergency law under Mubarak`s regime, has continued in both the interim and Morsi`s government, which means that the state can subject civilians to an emergency court as well as the military court. Both have been criticized because they fail to meet minimum standards of due process, where the defendants are deprived of many of their basic rights, like the right to appeal the verdict. Human Rights Watch has issued a report, which advise Morsi to urgently address the sectarian violence by bringing perpetrators to justice through fair trials (Al Ahram Online 2012b).

The calls for transparency and independent investigations of sectarian clashes are also repeated throughout the discussion on law enforcement. This was especially the case after the Maspero clashes, where the military decided that they should be the only authority to investigate the events. This was questionable since reports suggested that the military themselves had played an important part in the clashes, thus not being able to be fully objective in the upcoming investigations. This was proven a year after the events, when only three soldiers had been charged and held responsible for the clashes. The three soldiers were by the court ruled to be guilty of “negligence and absence of caution, while they were driving armed forces armored personnel carriers in an arbitrary fashion...leading them to strike the victims”. Nabil Gobrael, a human rights lawyer representing families after the clashes, criticized this sentence. He said that it was: “neither fair nor sufficient, in the end, army personal obey orders, the man who gave the order (Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi) should have faced trial” (Ibrahim 2012).

## **5.4 To what extent is the discussion of Coptic issues in the Egyptian press sectarian and polarizing?**



The previous sections have given the reader a brief introduction into the three most important discussions concerning Coptic issues, in the Egyptian media field after the revolution. In the next section, articles from these discussions will be used to conclude whether or not the Egyptian media presents Coptic issues in a sectarian and polarized way, using the tree conditions presented earlier in the thesis.

#### **5.4.1 Does the media present Muslims and Copts as inherently conflicting categories?**

The period of interest for this thesis starts with the revolution in January and February of 2011. Joseph Fahim (2011) describes January 25, 2011 as the day “Egypt became one”. He describes a genuine expression of national unity under both Muslim and Christian religious sermons, during the revolution. The national unity was expressed when Copts formed a protecting human shield around Muslims performing their Friday prayer, while Muslims joined the Christian sermons the following Sunday. The presentation of the two groups together in a joint struggle towards the regime, seem to underline the positivity that arose during the revolution, but as we know by the events that occurred later in 2011, the situation between Muslims and Copts deteriorated and returned to “normal”. The question is whether or not the discussions concerning Coptic issues in the printed media continued down the path outlined by Joseph Fahim’s article in Daily News Egypt, or if they turned towards presenting a picture of Muslims and Copts as two inherently conflicting categories.

Al Ahram Online’s discussion of Coptic issues often emphasize the Copts as “victims” in the Egyptian society. One get the impression that their situation in the country is difficult, because of their role as a minority, but also due to the powerful role the Coptic Church has played in the society, causing the passivity of the Coptic Community. The victimization of the Coptic community is often underlined with articles expressing their fears. They fear the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood (Fathi 2011b), they fear the future of their minority after Pope Shenouda passed away

(Ibrahim and Trew 2012), they fear the willingness of the interim rulers to clamp down on anti-Coptic incitement and attacks and they fear the political marginalization and possible isolation from the political scene (Ibrahim 2011).

Copts are also presented as a bit of an outsider in the Egyptian society by Al Ahram Online, and sometimes as they are not interested in the development of the political scene in Egypt. An example of this is in an article from the Coptic Christmas mass in 2012:

*While the nation is busy debating the pros and cons of potential presidential runners, these two (Coptic) women, like others present at the Coptic Cathedral on Christmas Eve, said that for them the greater concern is who will be the next patriarch, rather than president.*

(Ezzat 2012c)

The death of Pope Shenouda in March 2012, further fuelled articles about Copts insecurity for the future:

*We don't know what the situation will be for us Copts. We have to see who the new president is and what has been written in the constitution. If we have a Salafist or Muslim Brotherhood president this could be a disaster, as they will judge and control the country based on Muslim principles and may disregard us and our needs.*

(Ibrahim and Trew 2012)

The lack of interest in the Egyptian political scene is often explained with the community's high dependency on the Church. Al Ahram Online describes the community as a *flock* that prior to the revolution trustfully had followed Pope Shenouda in all his commands (Ibrahim 2011). This dependency is again evident in the aftermath of Pope Shenouda's death:

*Away from the matters of faith, which remain immune, there are serious questions as to how the Coptic Orthodox Church and Copts would attend to their role in a country undergoing transition, because during his years Pope Shenouda decided and the congregation of Copts followed.*

(Ezzat 2012a)

Even though one could claim, based on the examples presented above, that Muslims and Copts often are emphasized as two divided categories in Al Ahram Online they cannot be considered inherently conflicting. The newspaper does not emphasize a confrontational relationship between the two communities. “The sectarian issue in Egypt has always been strongly fostered by state security, who always maintained a strict monopoly over dealing with it. But now that they are gone, and we, the Egyptians, can actually face up to the problem and try to find solutions for it,” Ahmed Eid, a member of the 25 January youth coalition is quoted saying to Al Ahram Online (Fathi 2011a). Another article states that the young people of the revolution should have one truth in mind; “that only the ignorant would deny that the principles and goals of religion were, are and will always be at the core similar values of Egyptians before and after they became Muslims and Christians” (Abdel Alim 2011a).

Al Ahram Online often explain the occurrence of sectarian tension in Egypt with other factors, like the emergence of Salafist groups in the public sphere, and members of the old regime trying to stir tensions to start a counter-revolution, as in this article where Fathi (2011a) claims that: “State security has infiltrated the Salafist movement and is using them now in their attempt to foment a counter-revolution”. Another article argues that the state security is deeply entrenched in a conspiracy to oppress and terrorize Christians in order to foster support for the former regime. “What we are up against is a clearly mapped out plan of the counter-revolution which has taken as it’s main target the country’s Coptic Christians and any socially vulnerable group” (Shukrallah 2011). This may be seen as an attempt to try to curb the scope of this social problem, by blaming old forces for trying to destroy the revolution, thus denying the severity of sectarianism in Egypt.

Compared with Al Ahram Online, Daily News Egypt tries to provide a more nuanced picture of the Coptic community in their discussions of Coptic issues. After sectarian clashes, like the one happening in Imbaba in May 2011, Daily News Egypt tries to present a neutral and detailed picture of the events, by including reports from several eyewitnesses. Compared with Al Ahram Online, this newspaper more actively acknowledge that Egypt has a problem with sectarianism. After the Imbaba clashes, Sarah Khorshid (2011) argues that the sectarian problem in Egypt is broader than the context portrayed by many Western media outlets, which states that the Christian minority in Egypt is persecuted because of the religion they espouse. She says that “neither the toppled regime or the current authorities in Egypt got to the bottom of protesters objection over the alleged iron grip of the Coptic Orthodox Church on Christian women who attempt to convert to Islam and marry Muslim men”, stating that this is as big a problem as any other causing sectarian tension in the country. Another article published after the Imbaba clashes, undermined that there has to be a change in media and the teachings of religious scholars in order to ease the sectarian tension (Fahmy 2011a).

In their reporting, Daily News Egypt does not victimize the Coptic community, or emphasize their role as a minority in the Egyptian society. Instead, they present a community that has turned more active, both in terms of staging and participating in demonstrations outside of the Church, but also politically. Safaa Abdoun (2012) says that within the Coptic community “calls for change have been getting louder, both on the political side and for reforms within the church itself”. The Coptic community’s embracement of their new and active role after the revolution, are expressed in several articles in the newspaper, a Coptic protester outside the state-TV building in Maspero are quoted saying:

*We don't want to bury our heads in the sand. The issue is bigger than rebuilding a church or arresting the culprits. This is Egypt's fate. Is Egypt becoming a religious state or can we change course and opt for a civil state?*

(Daily News Egypt 2011b)

The discussion of Coptic issues in Daily News Egypt, cannot be considered to promote a view of Muslims and Christians being two inherently conflicting categories. Hellyer (2011) claim the Egyptian unity is stronger than the forces of division, and that the people of Egypt can fight sectarianism with patriotism. Abdoun (2012) writes after the passing of Pope Shenouda that “the idea of citizenship and that all Egyptians are one has flourished under the reign of Pope Shenouda”. As expressed in another article, problems Egypt faces in the time to come, is not only targeted at Copts, but must be faced by both Muslims and Christians: “Most worrying for Christians and many Muslims is the increasing boldness of the Salafi movement” (Daily News Egypt 2011b).

Egypt Independent’s discussion of Coptic issues also emphasizes the new role of the Coptic community in the Egyptian society, and the possibilities the community have in the “new” country. “We are now witnessing a deep shift in the status of Copts in society. The shift is from the failed policy of guardianship applied by the former regime to a democratic system in which Copts are pursuing their own political agendas without heavy interference from the church,” Hossam Tamam was quoted saying a month after the revolution (Osman 2011a). “Copts, like all other Egyptians have become used to being engaged and more involved since the revolution,” says another source (Elmeshad 2012).

The optimistic view on the new possibilities for Copts in Egypt was almost absent in the discussions in Al Ahram Online, and Paul Sedra confronts this in an article published in August 2012. He blames both the international and local media for victimizing Copts by presenting a devastating and depressing picture of their current situation. He states that the language of victimhood that has been dominating in the coverage of Coptic Christians assumes a passive community that is resigned to a fate of decline and possibly eviction. This is not true, Sedra argue, a new Coptic community has emerged in post-revolutionary Egypt, and their fate is dependent on

the political action of the Copts themselves. The presentation of their situation in media, has given a feeling that the Christian community needs to be saved, and Sedra mean that there is a need to emphasize the possibilities for the community in the new regime, to a greater extent (Sedra 2012). Hossam Tamam believes that the phase Egypt finds itself in now is especially ripe for Coptic gains; “Egypt is now heading into a democratic system that grants political power to any faction. Copts in this regard have a historic opportunity to increase their demands. Any political group would think sensitively about Coptic demands now” (Osman 2011a).

Egypt Independent has published some articles that are very critical towards Copts. These articles make a clear distinction between the Muslim and Coptic community, and is related to a debate concerning many Copts call for foreign help to better their situation. In an article published in the direct aftermath of the Imbaba clashes, the writer reacts on some Copts demonstrating outside of the American embassy in Cairo, asking for help to improve their situation in the country. He claims that: “calling for Copts rights is an issue that is to be solved internally, through non-violent resistance and an atmosphere of tolerance, and prosperity” (Egypt Independent 2011b). The writer claim that dissident Copts aim to degrade the Muslim community in order to give the Coptic community justice, and that Copts in Egypt, seldom or never raises demands on behalf of other suppressed minorities in the country, thus thinking only about themselves. This view is supported by a writer in Al Ahram Online, which states that: “Egyptian Christians must also reject fantasies about protection from abroad and seek cover under the banner of the Church, they must come to realize that they will not find security unless they join the mainstream democratic national Egyptian movement” (Abdel Alim 2011b). Even though this presentation does not provide a positive picture of the Copts in the Egyptian society, this can be considered an extreme example and these kinds of articles are not prevailing in Egypt Independent or in the other two papers.

In an effort to bring the two communities closer together, Nancy Messieh (2012) encourages a debate about shedding the label of the word “Copt”. She claims that this

label, by itself, creates a division between the Christian minority and the rest of the Egyptian citizens. Instead of emphasizing the Egyptian identity of Christians, the word “Copt” underlines the differences between Christians and Muslims, because it is nothing like the Arabic word for Egyptian, Masry. The discourse found in some Egyptian media, is clearly filled with sectarian undertones, and may use the word “Copts” to create a polarizing effect between the two communities. During the Maspero events in October 2011, state TV journalist Rasha Magdy emphasized that the Egyptian army was under attack from Copts. Labeling the protesters at Maspero, simply as Copts, instead of Egyptians or Egyptian Christians, created an instant division. Later that night, Messieh writes that, one could hear men marching through Tahrir Square chanting: “Where are the Copts? Islam is here”. This provides a good example on the power of the media, and how they do have an instant influence on their audience, and through this can create an insecure and dangerous environment. But a discourse, aiming to polarize the two communities is not evident in the three newspapers subject to this thesis.

As can be seen by the examples above there are differences among the three newspapers in terms of what they emphasize in their discussion of Coptic issues. In the post-revolutionary phase one can argue that there has been a transition towards a more neutral and inclusive presentation of the two groups, as can be found in several of the articles presented above, emphasizing Egyptians facing the problems to come together, national unity and embracing a discourse that emphasizes equality rather than differences in the Egyptian society.

#### **5.4.2 Does the media encourage violence?**

None of the newspapers, subject to this study has encouraged to violence, in their discussion of Coptic issues. Instead, they are used as arenas to express unity and mitigate thoughts of violence, as can be seen in the examples presented below from Al Ahram Online.

*Today, after the revolution, there is hope to rectify this (sectarian) situation... despite the rise of political Islamist trends, because as you can see not all Muslims are supporting these trends. If you want to be a true Christian you cannot fight hatred with hatred. You have to give love, even in the face of hatred. And to be quite honest, hatred is not really all around us.*

(Ezzat 2012b)

After the violence at Maspero in October 2011, the newspaper published a quote by the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of youth, which stated that he “would like all Copts not to resort to violence” (Tarek 2011).

But all of the newspapers report about the problem of encouragement of violence in other Egyptian media. In the aftermath of the clashes at Maspero in October 2011, Al Ahram Online accused state media of inciting sectarian hatred after a news anchor said live on TV that “the Christians were the aggressors and had attacked the army, which then needed to be defended by the population” (Abaza 2011). Daily News Egypt presented a report by The Arab Network for Human Rights Information that claim that “state TV masterminded an incitement campaign against Coptic protesters in the name of protecting the armed forces” (El Din 2011). Egypt Independent wrote an article about Coptic rights groups that demanded an independent investigation of the Maspero events, which also would have the authority to investigate the role of state TV (Khalil 2011).

Osama Heikal, the reinstated Information Minister, initially defended the coverage, but stated later that it was a result of “professional mistakes” and a “40-year heritage of corruption”. He pledged that these mistakes should not be repeated and said that he would not “allow Egyptian TV to discriminate against citizens” (Daily News Egypt 2011c). Even though the Ministry of Information publicly apologized for the reporting, thereby accepting that they had played a pivotal role in the events, and several sources demanded that the official television channel should be held



responsible for heating up the events, nothing happened. Neither, the television channel nor the journalists involved has faced charges afterwards.

There were reports about media encouraging to violence in relation with the Imbaba incidents in May, as well. In a report issued by the fact-finding committee of the National Council for Human Rights, satellite channels were blamed for inciting religious extremism before and during the Imbaba incident (El Elyan 2011b). In this context, Salafis was blamed for stoking rhetoric against Coptic Christians, both in mosques and in satellite TV, which accused the Copts of trying to break the Egyptian “Muslim character” (Daily News Egypt 2011b). In Egypt, the Salafists have been the major force behind anti-Coptic incitement (Fathi 2011a). Another report from the Egypt Independent (2011c) claimed that the spokesperson for a coalition called “Support New Muslims”, which works for the rights of people that has converted to Islam, started the rumour that led to the Imbaba clashes, on television, claiming that a bishop had abducted a Muslim convert and that Copts were firing at both Muslims and the army outside of the church. Encouraging to violence through media is not limited to only one of the groups, Egypt Independent (2011d) discuss this, and states that both Muslim and Christian groups have media channels, that provide an unhealthy “us vs. them” mentality, that can incite hatred and encourage to violence.

The encouragement of violence in the media seems to be limited to some state media, and satellite channels promoting radical Islamic views. Even though the picture presented above does not promote an optimistic view for the future, one can argue that there is a positive side to this. The newspapers subject for this thesis, has reported about state televisions role in the events, and blamed them for arousing the clashes. Thereby the printed press has taken on the role as a watchdog, by providing checks and balances on powerful sects of the society, and exposing abuse without fearing the consequences of doing so. In addition to this, writers in these newspapers have demanded that such behaviour should have consequences for the news anchors, and the Information Minister, Osama Heikal. There is obviously a change here, in that the

media more freely can criticize state media and state officials, without the need to be afraid for the post-censoring activities by the Egyptian regime afterwards.

One have to take into consideration that the newspapers studied for this thesis can be categorized as moderate newspapers, which can mean that they would seldom or never publish articles that encourage to violence. But as this thesis is concerned with some of the most widely read and influencing newspapers in Egypt, and most of the encouragement is found in radical/niche papers, with limited influence over the Egyptian population, one can not automatically conclude that a discourse encouraging to violence is a wide problem in the printed press.

#### **5.4.3 Does the issues being discussed in the media seem unsolvable or disruptive?**

If the issues discussed in media seem unsolvable or disruptive, it is reason to believe that this will further fuel tension between the two communities, because one gets the impression that the future will be no different than the situation is today.

The discussions presented in this thesis, does not seem unsolvable or disruptive. This is because the contributors to the discussions suggest many constructive and feasible solutions in the debates. In terms of the discussion about Coptic citizenship, almost everyone agrees on the need to first and foremost address what seems to be one of the underlying causes of the sectarian problem, which is the sectarian discourse one can find in education curricula and among religious leaders. This discourse emphasizes the differences between the two communities and ignites hatred towards the other. Public schools should promote dialogue and social coexistence between people of different religious backgrounds, says Saliba Sarsar (2011). She is supported by a report published by a British-based Research Center that states that the authorities need to update the educational curricula in order to help achieve true democracy (Egypt Independent 2011b).

Amr El Shobaki (2010a) argue that one have to keep religion aloof from politics in order to best ensure respect for the sanctity of faith. “Muslims and Copts were pushed into this circle of sectarianism when the government opened the door wide to a discourse that focused primarily on outward manifestations of religiosity” (El Shobaki 2010b). Shahira Amin (2012) writes about extremist preachers, that has been “fuelling sectarianism by citing less tolerant verses from the Quran in their Friday sermons”, for years. Sarsar (2011) states that everyone has an important role to play in promoting coexistence among the religious groups in Egypt, but religious leaders must take an extraordinary active role in this process and they need to come down strongly on any religiously motivated violence.

The discussion on the Church’s role in the Egyptian society makes it clear that it is an internal discussion that needs to be taken in the Church. The issue concerning the personal status law may seem unsolvable. Bishop Basanti is quoted as saying to Daily News Egypt: “Leave this to us, it is an internal affair that is peculiar to religion, which does not relate to politics” (Shalaby 2012). The Church has previously used this issue in order to legitimize their role as the most important institution in Copts daily life, and it may also seem unsolvable because there is not an overall agreement among the Coptic community, that one should make the personal status law a civil matter. “Any civil law for marriage will be strongly challenged by Muslims and Christians because of the religious nature of marriage in Egypt”, says a Georgette Qelliny, a former Coptic member of parliament (Mokhtar 2011).

Even so, this is a healthy discussion, and not a disruptive one, because it clarifies that the problem between the two communities is not solely spurred by the actions of just one of the parties. It is a useful discussion that needs to be taken during the political transition process, because the role of the Church in the Egyptian society has a big impact on the Coptic situation in the future. One can argue that the revolution eventually will lead to great changes in terms of the role of the Coptic Church in the Egyptian society, and without guessing to much about the future, one can expect that the newly inaugurated Pope Tawadros and his institution will need to make

amendments to keep up with the development in the Egyptian society after the revolution.

The solution to the discussion on law enforcement lies in the policy of the Egyptian state. After Mohamed Morsy's 100-day speech Maher Hamoud raised a question in Daily News Egypt, as to what happened with the Maspero massacre:

*Why don't we have a proper trial where the leaders of the military (not the poor soldiers) are in court? Why is the state/Mubaraks TV not on trial for calling on "the honourable citizens" to defend the army from the Copts?*

(Hamoud 2012)

The contributors to this discussion agree on the need to change the policy of prosecution in Egypt, the law should be enforced and its supremacy over all individuals and institutions must be maintained. The first thing one has to do is stop trying civilians before courts, which deprive them of many of their basic rights. The second thing is to ensure that all investigations are transparent and independent, making sure that the right people are being prosecuted (Al Ahram Online 2012a). If this problem is solved, one can argue that there will be a decrease in sectarian clashes in Egypt.

Neither one of the newspapers subject to this thesis present discussions of Coptic issues in a way that they appear unsolvable or disruptive. Some of the issues may seem hard to solve at this moment, but they cannot be considered unsolvable. The emergence of these discussions after the revolution might be a sign that there has been a transformation in the media field, where media more actively promotes and discuss difficult subjects that previously have been taboo. As stated by Sameh Ragaey (Daily News Egypt 2011e) there has been a more active presentation on different opinions, since the revolution. As claimed by Lubbers, Scheepers and Vergeer (2000), when people are exposed to several different opinions they adopt a more sophisticated attitude, and thus one can argue that the more contributors to a debate, the easier it is

to have fruitful debates which eventually can lead to finding solutions to the discussions above.

## **5.5 Media`s contribution to the transition process**

Media`s contribution to a transition process is, as stated by Bennett (1998), Curran (2005) and Haynes (2012), dependent on the condition of the civil society in the country. The effectiveness of the civil society is related to societal factors connected to ethnic and religious diversity, which in turn, reflects the quantity of social capital. Widespread societal hardship and social disintegration are some of the factors that could undermine the social capital of the country, and thus weaken the civil society.

In Egypt, societal hardship and disintegration is expressed through the explosion of sectarian events. Thus one might assume that the civil society is weak, and that an “unleashed” media would cause more harm than good to the transition process in Egypt. However, the development after the revolution suggests that this is not the case, and this can be claimed to be a result of the general development in the media field. The Egyptian public has been exposed to new media outlets, through the Internet and the emergence of social media. During the revolution in 2011, new social media was actively used by the youth to arrange demonstrations and coordinate strategies. The emergence of new media outlets has exposed people to different opinions before, during and after the revolution, giving the public a chance to adopt democratic discourse, and thus making them susceptible to a new and flourishing media environment after the revolution.

There has been a change in the media in terms of discussing problems concerned with societal hardship and disintegration, this is showed in the writings of Elisabeth Iskander (2012), which says that the coverage of the sectarian problem has increased after the revolution. Curran (2005:138) states that in order for the civil society to grow stronger, one objective for the media is to give adequate expression to differences and conflicts within the society. The emergence of different opinions and attitudes in

media is one of the effects of the revolution. This is a good contribution from the media to the transitioning phase Egypt finds itself in, because the different fractions of the civil society gets to express their opinions, and thus take an active part in the debates which may form the transition process.

## 6 Conclusion

The discussion of Coptic issues, after the revolution in Egypt is interesting, because suddenly the media flourishes with different opinions and values. The three newspapers, Al Ahram Online, Daily News Egypt and Egypt Independent cannot be considered sectarian or polarizing in their discussion of Coptic issues. They publish articles with statements from several sides of the political arena, as well as expressing views from both the Muslim and the Christian community, thereby presenting several different opinions in the debates. This conclusion may be related to the fact that they are considered the most influential and widely read newspapers in the society, and thus have to take a neutral stand in order to reach a greater public.

Even though these three papers are promoting a neutral view on Coptic issues, does not mean that this is the general state in the Egyptian media. In the articles from these three newspapers, one find claims that several Egyptian media still presents the Copts in a non-favorable way. It seems that, based on the newspapers reports, as well as statements from human rights groups after the Maspero clashes that state TV may be more sectarian and polarizing than newspapers. This is a problem, and may decrease the value of media`s contribution in the transition process. In addition to state TV encouraging to violence, this kind of discourse also seemed to come from radical or niche papers. But as this thesis is concerned with some of the most widely read and influencing newspapers in Egypt, one cannot automatically conclude that this kind of discourse is a wide problem in the printed press. Al Ahram Online and Egypt Independent are two of the most influential newspapers in Egypt, so one can expect that the views and opinions stated in these papers will more easily be absorbed and prevailed in the general public.

As one can consider some of the state-owned TV stations sectarian and polarizing towards the Coptic community after the Egyptian revolution, one might assume that

this kind of reporting could be found in state-owned newspapers like Al Ahram Online, as well. The difference found between the state-owned and the independent newspapers in this thesis, show in fact, that Al Ahram Online present another view on Copts than the two others. Some of their reporting tends to “victimize” the Christian community, thus emphasizing the differences between the two communities, rather than their unity. This can be related to William S. Bainbridge’s (2007) definition of religious sectarianism, where social factors, like opportunities in the society, maintain the separateness of each group, and cause fragmentation in the society. Thus, one may claim that the coverage of Coptic issues in state media as a whole, is more sectarian and polarizing, than the independent media in the country. Even though, this will not change the overall conclusion of the thesis, because one cannot find a coverage in Al Ahram Online that systematically divides between the two communities, encourages to violence or present discussions that are unsolvable or disruptive.

One may also conclude that the Egyptian print media will contribute positively to the transition process, because of their new diversity in terms of allowing several different opinions and values be expressed, as well as writing about issues that previously have been taboo.

Even though, the three newspapers subject for this thesis cannot be considered sectarian and polarizing in their discussions of Coptic issues, and media may be considered as a positive contributor to the transition process, through the presentation of different values and opinions, there are still challenges for the Egyptian media in the future. Lina Attalah, the chief editor of Egypt Independent, was interviewed in April 2013 on the challenges of post-revolution Egypt. She stated that one still find:

*a regime-engineered discourse basically blaming Christians for the violence, although the violence was not perpetrated originally by Christians, and at the same time, also sweeping the (sectarian) problem under the rug and not trying to hold those responsible for the violence accountable.*

(Laiq 2013)



She agrees that there is a proliferation of content and platform after the revolution, more media diversity, and an eagerness to deal with a new set of issues with more freedom, but she warns about saying “that it’s all good and we shouldn’t worry about freedom of expression because people have just become empowered and everything” (Laiq 2013).

It is impossible to conclude on how the development in Egypt will unfold, hopefully the country face a bright future where diversity is embraced as a positive feature of the society, and where the Egyptian media contributes to a stable and peaceful environment.

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