INTRODUCTION

IN DECEMBER 2004, sectarian tension broke out between Muslims and Christians in Egypt over the alleged conversion of Wafā' Qustantīn, a Coptic Christian, to Islam. Qustantīn was the wife of a Coptic priest and had allegedly converted to Islam to escape marital problems, having previously and unsuccessfully sought a divorce (Islamic law forbids a Muslim woman from being married to a non-Muslim man, so on Qustantīn's conversion, her marriage would be annulled). Due to social and economic pressures, the conversion to Islam by Egyptian Christians is a relatively common occurrence in Egypt. However, in a society that is based on the religious family, such conversions are also a source of considerable shame.[1] The conversion of a priest's wife was viewed as particularly egregious and was vehemently resisted by many Copts.

The Coptic Church claimed that Wafā' Qustantīn had converted under duress.[2] The U.S. Copts Association (USCA), which lobbies on behalf of Copts in Egypt, claimed that Qustantīn had been forced to convert and petitioned President George W. Bush to intervene.[3] Western media seized upon this allegation and did not report the Muslim perspective. In Egypt, many Copts, having been mobilized by the Coptic Church, demonstrated. Pope Shenouda III, the current Coptic patriarch, demanded that Qustantīn be returned to the church. She was subsequently handed over by security forces, symbolizing, according to one commentator, that the church had "twisted the arm of the state."[4] Qustantīn was then detained in a monastery in Wadi al-Natrūn, north of Cairo, for closed-door church advisory sessions. There are indica-

tions that she is still being held in a monastery, possibly in a monastery for Coptic Orthodox nuns. The church has stated that Qustantīn still embraces her Christian faith and that she has not been forced to convert back to Christianity. However, according to the London newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, in a telephone interview Qustantīn affirmed that she had converted to Islam.[5]

The incident sparked debate within Egypt over the relationship between the Coptic Church and the Egyptian state. Some criticized the state for failing to protect Qustantīn from the church's illegal and unconstitutional detention, while others argued that the political role of the church was an "unchristian" aberration and called upon Copts to become fully involved with Muslims in Egypt's state institutions.[6] Such a critique of the political role of the church poses interesting questions in contemporary Egypt when such Islamists seek to Islamize both the state and the political process. How can Copts, it might be asked, be expected to become more politically involved in the institutions of the state when the state itself has been Islamized?

The Wafā' Qustantīn incident illustrates the challenge facing contemporary Egypt concerning the relationship between religion and state and the role of non-Muslims. It raises the question of what kind of role and status non-Muslims have in contemporary Egypt. When Islamists call for the implementation of *sharī'a* (Islamic law) and for the fulfillment of what they see as Egypt's constitutional commitment to an Islamic state, what implications does this have for non-Muslims, both as individuals and as members of religious communities? How do both Muslims and non-Muslims understand issues such as religious freedom, conversion, and individual autonomy? What does citizenship mean in this context and what is its relationship with religious identity?

This book addresses these questions by examining Egyptian Islamist attitudes toward non-Muslims—the vast majority of whom are Coptic Christians—focusing on the rights, role, and status of non-Muslims. It also examines non-Muslim responses to these attitudes. It explores the ways in which the concepts of religious tolerance, pluralism, and citizenship, and the relationship between religion and state are articulated and understood within the Egyptian Islamist framework. While literature in this field has given much attention to Islamist attitudes toward the West and Westerners and has provided important insights into Muslim historical and doctrinal positions on Christianity, little work has focused specifically on how modern, politically oriented Egyptian Islamists perceive Christians in an Islamic state.[7]

ISLAM, CITIZENSHIP, AND PLURALISM

The rights and role of non-Muslims within an Islamic state is an important issue in the current context. The rise of political Islam and calls for the application of *sharīʿa* have provoked considerable debate about the compatibility of democracy, tolerance, and pluralism with the Islamist position. Central to this debate is how *sharīʿa* will be applied and by whom. An analysis of Islamist views on how the application of *sharīʿa* will affect non-Muslims provides important insight into these questions.

The question of the rights and role of non-Muslims is a politically charged topic. From a historical perspective, the role of non-Muslims in Islamic societies has been used by Islamophobes as evidence of Islam's intolerance. This is still true today. Coptic activists, particularly Coptic expatriates, have exploited these assumptions, and Michael Munīr, who heads the Washington-based U.S. Copts Association (USCA), repeatedly appeals to the U.S. Congress to penalize Egypt for alleged persecution of Copts. In 1998 the U.S. Congress passed the Freedom from Religious Persecution Act, largely as a result of Coptic lobbying. The law imposes automatic sanctions on those countries seen to engage in ongoing persecution of persons on account of their religious beliefs.

Claims that the application of *sharīʿa* in Egypt will inevitably lead to the persecution of non-Muslims are central to the popular assumption that Islamic civilization is somehow antithetical to a reified and idealized Western civilization that is based on democracy, citizenship, and human rights. The view that Islam is unable to evolve these values is linked to the notion that Islam is a political religion in which religion and politics are unified, a relationship that is held as problematic. The assumption is that democracy and tolerance are conditional upon the separation of religion and state and of civil and religious law. Hence, from this perspective, Islam poses a problem because it is assumed that it does not accept such distinctions.

Academic literature has challenged the assumption that toleration is contingent upon the separation of religion and politics. Talal Asad has questioned secular modernity's monopoly on tolerance, human rights, and democracy.[8] Asad argues that one should question the notion that secularism is the modern formula for toleration, pointing out that "there are intolerant secular societies and tolerant religious ones."[9] This position has coincided with an important shift in our understanding of Islamism. Literature on liberal Islam has emphasized that Islam is not a monolithic entity and is currently represented by divergent views.[10] It holds that liberal principles can be found in an Islamic framework.

However, arguments that Islam can be and is tolerant may fall into the trap of essentialism. The tendency has been to use the freedom of religion that non-Muslims historically had under Islamic law as an indication of Islam's tolerance. Such approaches are sometimes accompanied by assertions about the intrinsic nature of Islam and assume that intolerant acts toward non-Muslims are an "un-Islamic" aberration and a "misinterpretation" of its foundational texts. It is asserted that Islamism is a political ideology that is somehow distinct from Islam itself. This approach assumes that there is a fixed Islam from which it is possible to depart. While such a reification is a problem with many discussions about religion, Islam, particularly in the current context, is especially prone to being defined and reified.

The danger is that this view descends into a dichotomized debate that is represented either by claims that Islam is, in essence, antithetical to human rights and democracy or by claims that it is the opposite. In fact, the question of whether Islam as a religion is or is not democratic is of limited use. Asef Bayat argues that a more appropriate question is "under what conditions Muslims can *make* them compatible."[11]

This book does not attempt to address the question of the "essential" nature of Islam. Rather, it focuses on Islamist thought as articulated by Islamist thinkers and actors and looks at how Islamists are framing discussions of democracy and citizenship. Rather than asking the question of whether Islam is compatible with tolerance, pluralism, and citizenship, it asks how contemporary Egyptian Islamists are articulating, responding to, and interpreting the concepts of tolerance, pluralism, and citizenship. This is done by exploring the specific implications and underlying assumptions behind these ideas.

CITIZENSHIP AND PLURALISM IN EGYPT

This book analyses Islamist discussions of citizenship and pluralism within Egyptian Islamist thought. Egypt is the intellectual center of the Middle East. It is where political Islam was established with the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Egypt's experience of Islamic thought and activism has considerable influence throughout the Middle East and the Islamic world. The direction in which Egypt goes in terms of the development of political Islam will reverberate throughout the region. Egypt also has the largest Christian community in the Middle East, which is why the issue of the role of non-Muslims features so prominently in Islamic thought.

The current prominence of the issue of religious minorities is also related to the fact that it connects with broader issues such as the place of pluralism, democracy, and Egyptian identity in contemporary Egyptian society. These issues are caught up in the conflict between the current ruling regime, secularists, and Islamist opposition groups. When Egyptian Islamists write about citizenship and pluralism within an Islamic framework, they are both responding to the reality on the ground and, in turn, contributing to the Egyptian political debate. Thus any analysis of Islamist discourse on citizenship must consider its contextual constraints.

At the same time, this is not to say that Islam has no role. Many aspects of Islamist thought are influenced by what Asad has defined as the Islamic "discursive tradition" or "a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present."[12] Islam's foundational texts—the Qur'an, the Hadith (written records of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad), and Islamic jurisprudence—make up this tradition. Islamists engage with these texts and use them to legitimize and understand current realities. However, this does not mean that modern Islamists respond to the tradition monolithically or that these texts determine how Islam is applied and invoked today.

In fact, modern manifestations of Islam should be understood in terms of local manifestations of Islam being organized through the Islamic discursive tradition. While contemporary discourse is influenced by Islamic history and thought, it cannot be understood as a direct continuity with that thought. This engagement with tradition and context produces considerable diversity within a supposed rigid ideology.

This book is an analysis of this debate within Egypt, and the responses examined here are distinctly Egyptian ones. One can find a range of different responses within the Islamic world to the question of religious minorities. For example, in Indonesia, the Islamic discourse has given attention to the rights of non-Muslims and has drawn upon the Islamic tradition to argue for equality and citizenship.[13] On the other hand, there is Pakistani experience whereby the Blasphemy Law has been used as a tool for "exploiting and oppressing the weak and the vulnerable in the nation, such as the religious minorities and sects."[14]

The historical and contemporary context—in this case the relations between Muslims and Copts in Egypt—therefore influences the formation of thought. An analysis of Islamic views on citizenship in the Egyptian context must also analyze the Coptic response to these views. Copts themselves are not

passive recipients or victims of Islamist ideas and political behavior. Recently there has been an increase in literature that goes beyond the effect of Islamism on Muslim-Christian relations and addresses the Coptic community itself.[15] Copts are in fact part of an ongoing debate within Egypt and with Islamists themselves about the relationship between religion, state, and Islamist conceptions of citizenship.[16] Coptic views on these issues illustrate the variety and complexity of the Coptic position.

ISLAMISM

While this book examines the effect of modernizing pressures on political Islam, defining the term "political Islam" is not an easy task. While I use the terms "Islamism" and "political Islam," there is no shortage of debate about when, how, and even whether we should use such labels. While Gilles Kepel argues that Islamism "is in effect nothing but a name among others," and others hold that it is not a term of self-designation, the term does have a certain function.[17]

A working definition of Islamism is the belief that Islam is an all-embracing ideology for state and society, which is one of the most fundamental concepts of the Islamic revival. It holds that Islam needs to be expressed politically: Islam is more than a system of religious belief and practice. Political Islam is a reaction to the perception that the modern Islamic world has been disconnected from the premodern Islamic order. While Islamists hold that this disconnection began to occur when Muslims drifted away from Islam in the medieval era, it was consolidated with the imposition of Western law during the second half of the nineteenth century. Political Islam calls for the reversal of such secularization and for the unity of religion and state. Islamists include a wide range of thinkers who have differing attitudes about what kind of political system would result, including whether that system would be democratic and, if so, in what way.[18] Islamism also includes a range of attitudes about whether or not the current political system in Egypt is considered Islamic.

The Islamist agenda has evolved from being a position taken by radical Islamist activists to being the status quo, in the sense that the majority of the Egyptian population supports the application of *sharīʿa*.[19] This is not to say that Egyptian secular intellectuals do not exist or that there are no other ways of conceptualizing this question. However, this book is primarily a book about political Islam. In the process of becoming the status quo, the Islamist agenda has become more diverse, and there has also been a general shift away from

utopian agendas to more pragmatic ones that take into account the reality of the Egyptian nation-state. At the same time, Egyptian society and, to a certain extent, the state have become increasingly Islamized, a development that has meant that the space within which Islamist opposition to the state can operate has narrowed.

Some have argued that the increasing pragmatism of Islamists is an indication that the movement has failed. Kepel has taken the position that Islamic radicalism reached its peak long ago and has failed to bring about an Islamic revolution, establish an Islamic state, or effect substantial political reform.[20] He differentiates Islamism from post-Islamism, defining the latter as a movement in which intellectuals are calling for a transition from militant Islamism to an Islamic democracy. He argues that this reinvention is effectively a "disqualification of its ideology as a global vision."[21]

While it is true to say that most Islamists have moved away from rejecting the state to working within it, the Islamists' capacity to change their approach is not necessarily an invalidation of the movement or of its aims. If Islamism is simply a movement to express Islam politically, then this is just as true of movements that call for an Islamic democracy as it is of those that reject democracy in the name of Islam.

Even in Muslim states where Islamists have failed to bring about an Islamic revolution and establish a self-proclaimed Islamic state, a considerable process of Islamization has occurred. A large number of Muslim-majority states have some sort of constitutional commitment to Islam: some states are deemed "Islamic States"; some declare Islam as the state religion; some define *sharīʿa* as *a* source or *the* source of national legislation; and some maintain that any law enacted must not be contrary to Islamic tenets.[22]

In Egypt, since 1980, Article 2 of the constitution has stated that "the principles of *sharīʿa* are the major source of legislation." The Supreme Constitutional Court has developed a substantive body of jurisprudence applying Article 2, which has involved upholding some laws as consistent with the principles of *sharīʿa* and striking others down as inconsistent.[23] While Islamist parties are illegal and face persecution under an authoritarian regime, a process of Islamization has been under way since the early twentieth century and, in particular, since the 1970's. This Islamization has altered discourse on morality, politics, economics, dress, and the symbols that leaders use to gain legitimacy. While Egypt might not have turned into a fully Islamic state from the perspective of some Islamists, the pervading influence of the Islamist agenda is

clear, so that many secularists feel that Egypt has become more Islamic despite the fact that the Islamists have not come to power.

It is perhaps the very failure of the Egyptian Islamist movement to bring about an Islamic revolution that has contributed to its endurance. The opposition status of the Islamist movement, which astutely emphasizes government corruption and provides social services that the state has failed to offer, has served to bolster their popularity. The capacity of the Islamist movement to respond to the practical demands of political organization in a modern nation-state has also contributed to its endurance.

In the 2005 Egyptian parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood, which is not a legally recognized party, gained 20 percent of the seats by fielding candidates as independents. Such electoral success raises the question of what changes the Muslim Brotherhood would make. How would the Islamists mould Egypt into an Islamic state in which Islamic law is fully applied? What would constitute national identity? What would their position be on democracy, citizenship, and the rights of non-Muslims?

In Egypt, there is a sizeable Coptic community, about 90 percent of whom are Orthodox, with the remaining 10 percent made up of Catholic and Protestant Copts. It constitutes the largest Christian minority in the Middle East. The percentage of the Egyptian population that is Coptic Christian is disputed. It is impossible to know the number, since censuses do not reveal the number of Christians in Egypt.[24] When asked why the number of Copts was not included in the 2007 census report, the head of the Central Apparatus for Public Mobilization and Statistics said, "Ask about anything but this matter which is bound to bring us a headache."[25] Radical Coptic activists have claimed that Copts constitute 25 percent of the population.[26] The Coptic Church has stated that Copts make up anywhere from 12 to 18 percent of the population, a number that is supported by the U.S. Copts Association.[27] In 1994 Saad Eddin Ibrahim argued that Copts represented 10 percent, a figure that is supported by the *CIA World Factbook*.[28] The most reasonable estimate comes from the Center for Arab-West Understanding, which closely monitors Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt and holds that Copts cannot be more than 5 or 6 percent of the total population, since the Coptic population has been steadily decreasing because of a lower birth rate, conversions, and emigration.[29] This has been confirmed by the 2009 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, which states that 94.6 percent of the Egyptian population is Muslim.[30] There are also other non-Muslim communities in Egypt. While it is impossible to be specific, those

include a small number of Bahā'īs, estimated to be around 1,500 to 2,000, and a few hundred Jews.[31]

The reluctance to ascertain the number of Copts is a further indication of how politically charged the subject is. While discussion about the Copts has become much more open since the turn of the century, references to national unity serve to deflect attention from a frank discussion of the issue. The question of the role and status of Egypt's Copts cuts to the core of the challenges facing the Egyptian state, challenges that include the relationship between religion and state and the extent to which Egypt is in fact a secular or an Islamic state. Discussions about minority rights are viewed as threatening the status quo, which the government wishes to maintain.

MODERNIZATION

The challenges facing Islamists in modern Egypt are similar to those facing Islamist movements throughout the Islamic world. Modernization has brought with it the pressure to evolve democracy, human rights, and citizenship, concepts that are theorized and thought about under the influence of Western ideological hegemony. Contemporary Islamists face the test of how Islamic law, which was formed in the context of a victorious premodern empire, can be applied in a very different context such as that of the modern nation-state. Before Egypt's dislocation from the Ottoman Empire in 1914, it was part, albeit loosely, of a unified Islamic Empire, which, before the Ottoman *tanzimat* reforms (1839–1876), was conceived of as being based on *sharī'a* even though in practice there was considerable recourse to non-*sharī'a* elements. The application of Western law and the abolition of the caliphate in 1924 symbolized the break—although it was more symbolic than real—with the concept of a unified Islamic political order.

Marshall Hodgson has argued that while all modern societies face some kind of dislocation, in the West this process has been less traumatic because it has been slower. For the Islamic world, such dislocation is less easy to absorb because it has been more sudden and severe. In addition, the political and legal institutions that were imposed upon the Islamic world largely evolved in the West.[32]

This dislocation has been keenly felt. While it may be that the notion of a rupture has been exaggerated, on a psychological level it is integral to Islamist self-definition. In 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood called for a return to an original and pure Islam, in which religion and state would be unified. In

advocating an Islamic state, Islamists are functioning in a context that is very different from that of the Ottoman and other Islamic empires. Modern Islamists face the challenge of how to apply Islamic law and premodern Islamic institutions in a new context, raising the question of what meaning the Islamic religious heritage can still have for contemporary Muslims.[33]

Answering such a question is often hampered by claims made by Muslims and by non-Muslims that the Islamic tradition is fixed, based on the assumption that the divinely revealed law cannot be changed.[34] However, that is not the case. Though Islamic historical models are invoked as important precedents, in fact, as Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori point out, "emendations and additions to a purportedly invariant and complete Islamic law (*shari'a*) have occurred throughout Islamic history, particularly since the mid-nineteenth century." They argue that the division between tradition and modernity oversimplifies the interaction between religion and tradition.[35] In fact, when Islamists invoke traditions when claiming to return to an earlier practice, they do in fact reinvent those traditions. While Eickelman and Piscatori illustrate that the invention of tradition is an ongoing process, referring to Hodgson they show that it is more likely in societies where a rapid transformation that undermines social patterns occurs.[36]

By examining Islamist articulations of pluralism and citizenship in relation to the role of non-Muslims, this book illustrates the complex ways in which Islamic tradition is modified, reinterpreted, and changed in response to the demands of modernity.

SOURCES

The book is based on writings and political tracts by Islamist and Coptic intellectuals, activists, authors, and politicians as well as a broad range of newspaper articles. The materials include popular texts by Islamist preachers and activists as well as texts by Islamist thinkers and intellectuals. I have examined the work and writings of intellectuals, preachers, and activists because in Islamist thought the boundaries between the intellectual and the political worlds are porous. The ideas of intellectuals are used and referred to by activists, and many intellectuals are aware of their political role when writing.

In as many cases as possible, I have supplemented the writings of Islamists and Copts with interviews conducted with prominent Islamist and Coptic activists, thinkers, and politicians during fieldwork in 2003 and 2007. Interviews are always influenced by the perceived relationship between interviewer

and interviewee, and there is no doubt that my position as a non-Muslim (I was frequently asked whether I was a Jew or a Christian) meant that my interviewees were interested in presenting the most favorable position on non-Muslims. It is inevitable, given the history of the topic, that my position as a non-Muslim looking at the question of the role of non-Muslims in an Islamic state would provoke some defensiveness. The role of religious minorities cuts to the very core of issues that are contested in contemporary Egypt. However, I did not encounter significant differences between what was said in interviews and what is written in texts. The subject is a politically charged one, so the preponderance of rhetoric and politicized statements is evident in both texts and interviews.

Nevertheless, this defensiveness should not be used to discredit the integrity of the statements. Islamists are particularly prone to accusations of duplicity, and are frequently accused of presenting one picture to the public—and to a person such as myself in particular—and hiding an alternative, more "Islamic" agenda. Islamists are like any other political group, and their positions shift and change. Their organizations are made up of members with different views and agendas, and policy statements can often be the result of one group gaining the upper hand. Neither is the problem of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee or text and audience particular to Islamism. It is inevitable that my presence as an interviewer would have an effect on the information given by Copts. In this case, there might be a tendency for Copts to impart more antipathy about Muslims and Islam than they would otherwise admit to, in the hope that a supposed coreligionist would have more sympathy for their views.