A Historical Perspective on the Relationship between the State and Minorities in Egypt: Lessons from the Interwar Jewish Case

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Abstract

This paper will explore the relationship between the state and minorities in Egypt, in particular the Jewish community in the so-called liberal age that began with the 1919 Revolution and the drafting of the 1923 constitution and lasted until 1952. It seeks to an answer an important question: What was the attitude of the Egyptian state and society toward minorities in this period? How did the general climate contribute to a flourishing political and partisan elite in all communities; enriching political, cultural, and economic life in the country, and contributing to the struggle against the British occupation? Relying heavily on postcolonial theory in its analysis, this paper seeks to better our understanding of colonial dynamics between East and West and how these dynamics impacted both Jewish enlightenment discourse—and here I specifically mean Arab Jews as citizens of the states in which they lived—and the Egyptian state, then under British occupation.

Keywords: Egypt; Constitution; Minorities; Jews; Citizenship

Introduction

Since the 1919 Revolution, several questions have continued to be asked in the Egyptian state and society. The Arab Spring uprisings made these questions newly relevant, though they remain unanswered. They include such issues as the status of minorities in Egyptian society (Jews then, Copts today) and their relationship to the state,[1] the state and society's attitude toward minorities, the prevalence of nationalist thought in the economy and society and its impact on both, the meaning of Islamic renewal, anti-colonialism and national independence, and the attitude toward the Palestinian cause. The Arab Spring added the issue of human rights, which became a prominent subject of discussion.

This study seeks to answer a major question: What was the relationship between the Egyptian state and minorities? In attempting to answer it, the paper will touch on relevant secondary questions as well. What was the basis and form of this relationship, and what factors determined and drew its boundaries? Did minorities in Egypt enjoy religious and political freedom in the past? Has the status of minorities changed, and why?

The political and social discourse of various political groups was forged as these questions came to the fore with the 1919 Revolution. This discourse also attempted to answer an important question about the identity of these political groups, and this was especially true of Jews in this period, who gave different answers to the question of whether they were Egyptians, Jews, or Arabs. This raises a further question: What was the position of Jews in Egyptian society between 1914 and 1952, specifically during the interwar period? Was it entirely different from other minorities, such as the Coptic minority?

In an interwar climate characterized by a lack of discrimination against minorities, divergent political movements emerged in Egypt in this period, including Young Egypt,[2] the Wafdist Vanguard, the Feminist Union, and communist groups like the Egyptian Movement for National Liberation (ISKRA) and HADITU in the 1940s—which saw strong minority involvement, especially by the Jewish minority[3]—as well as political Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, formed in 1928. Zionism, too, benefitted from this lack of discrimination and general political freedom, and was promoted by Jewish bourgeois intellectuals like Jacques Mosseri,[4] who had close ties with Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann and others who frequently visited Egypt. Thanks to financial support from these intellectuals, the Zionist movement was active, establishing newspapers that adopted Zionism and advocated the resettlement of Jews in Palestine and employing the prevalent discourse at the time on citizenship and political rights,[5] and the freedom of expression upheld by the 1923 constitution.

The relationship between the state and its minorities, which in this period was based on the principle of citizenship, was undergirded by concepts like freedom of expression, national independence, and representative democracy, as well as the right to issue newspapers, part of a system of free expression guaranteed by the 1923 constitution.

This study also explores the relationship between citizenship as a concept, which was first codified in law in 1923, and practical attempts to apply it, looking at the obstacles encountered, particularly in the courts. Although state reform attempts to consolidate the judiciary into a uniform system were ultimately unsuccessful, historically it remains an important experiment: It was the sole attempt in modern Egyptian history to lay the foundations for a secular system based on the separation of religion and state and establish a value system grounded in human rights (and this even before the drafting of UN human rights conventions). This episode also reflects the dynamic governing the relationship between the state and minorities in this period.

Indeed, the interwar period was chosen for study for its ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, when Egypt was home to more than ninety minority communities, leading Orientalists to describe it as the centre of minorities in the Middle East. The Jewish community itself was highly diverse, speaking multiple languages depending on their origin or from where they immigrated.[6]

Methodologically, this study draws on New History,[7] embedding textual analysis and theoretical arguments into the historical context in an attempt to revive historical agency and critique discriminatory structures. In many of its analytic aspects, the paper also relies on the contributions of postcolonial theory. Its aim is to better the understanding of colonial dynamics between East and West and the impact of this dynamic on both Jewish Enlightenment discourse—and here I specifically mean Arab Jews as citizens of the states in which they lived—and the Egyptian state, then under British occupation.

At the same time, the paper attempts to explain the relationship between the state and its social constituencies, particularly minority communities, and understand the dynamic of inter-minority relations, which was based on bourgeois class hegemony in the Gramscian sense,[8] meaning the bourgeoisie's dominance and control of the sect or minority to which they belonged and their alliance with the state to support its rule. In other words, this study seeks to clarify how bourgeois intellectuals allied with the state

and asserted hegemony over their respective minority communities and understand their relationship with the state and their interactions with their own social milieu.

This hegemony is exemplified in the bourgeoisie's control of the communal councils, as well as the creation of power centres in various communal councils through economic might, which heavily influenced the councils' religious and political orientation. It is significant that internal elections on the communal councils were based on a community tax; those who wished to vote on the council's membership had to pay a tax, the *'arikha*, for three consecutive years, with the size of the tax dependent on a person's income. Paying a higher tax guaranteed a vote in the internal elections, thus making it possible to assume control of the council. In short, the wealthy inevitably dominated the communal council.[9]

Between Economic Modernization and Egyptian Nationalism

Most scholars researching the history of Egyptian Jews focus on the high bourgeoisie, given that class's strong representation in politics, the economy, and culture and their close ties to the state and its institutions. The majority of this class were Rabbinic, Sephardic Jews. They dominated other Jewish communities, such as Karaites and Ashkenazis, and played a prominent role in Egyptian cultural, political, economic, and social life and economic modernization. In regard to the press,[10] under the Publications Law of 1881, these intellectuals established private newspapers as a platform for the discussion of issues relevant to their religious communities as well as the general political situation in Egypt. They also established Jewish schools that helped to revive Hebrew, many of which were later linked to the Zionist movement and spread its ideology, like the schools affiliated with the Alliance Israélite Universelle.[11]

This is a reflection of the reality that existed from 1919 to the Tripartite Aggression, when the UK, France, and Israel invaded Egypt in 1956, and it shows how the general climate at the time facilitated the Jewish integration into Egyptian society. The crucial point—and my personal opinion—is that the rise of nationalism in Egypt is bound up with modernization across several areas, particularly state administration and education, and this helped to familiarize the Egyptian elite with the European reality and pertinent issues of the day, with which they engaged and brought to the Arab world.

Egyptian Jews' links to the European Enlightenment—and with the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah, that developed within it—exposed them to European civilization and made them more open to it. They thus played a strong role in Egyptian economic modernization.[12] This contribution, made under the British occupation, can give us insight into the groups that controlled the Egyptian economy at the time: the British political and military elite in Egypt, urban residents, and the oligarchic class,[13] as well as the propertied, professional class (bureaucrats and teachers). This fourth class found a place for itself within the nationalist political parties, primarily the Wafd, which represented liberal nationalism.

At that time an inclusive party, the Wafd brought together various segments of Egyptian society, including minorities as a matter of course. Both Copts and Jews joined the Wafd Party and reached leadership positions within it. For example, Coptic intellectual Morcos Hanna became party secretary in November 1919, and the party boasted many Coptic members. Looking at the role of minorities, particularly Jewish businessmen, in Egypt's economic modernization, brings us to a discussion of the role of foreigners in ending colonization and the role of foreign companies in decolonization generally.[14]

Studying Jews as an immigrant minority (particularly those who came to Egypt from other countries) will aid our understanding of the political diversity within Jewish communities. Here I mean the fusion between issues salient to the lands in which they lived and issues of particular importance to Jews as a minority with their own nationalist discourse, which they were at the time striving to establish and defend.

It will also help us to understand the hierarchical composition of this group, which is very similar to that of the same groups from other countries.

One feature of this hierarchical composition was an upper class of Egyptian Jews (the bourgeoisie) who invested in various sectors and had strong ties to the monarchy at the time. For example, the head of the Sephardic Jewish Communal Council, Yusuf Aslan Qattawi Pasha, was twice appointed minister from 1924 to 1925. Mourad Farag Bey, the head of the Karaite Jewish Communal Council, was the khedive's personal attorney, and Khedive Abbas Helmi II granted him the title of bey in recognition of his service.[15]

From Protected Minority to Citizen

As resistance to the British occupation intensified and with the 1919 Revolution, a discourse of citizenship rights and freedoms began to take shape, its content influenced by the European Enlightenment. The vision of each political grouping at the time drew inspiration from this broad liberal Enlightenment discourse, with the Wafd Party as its most prominent representative. Many minorities joined the Wafd on this basis, believing in the liberal principles it espoused and in defense of a state of civil liberties and citizenship. While Egyptian political resistance to British colonial rule reached its peak in the interwar period, the British occupation also spurred a discussion of several political and social issues, most significantly about whether Egypt should be seen as a Pharaonic or Arab-Islamic country, or whether it was shaped in accordance with the secular values of the British occupation, particularly as concerns social and political issues.

In this period, a shift occurred in Egyptian society, and within the state, in the way minorities (for example, Jews and Copts) were described, as the term 'citizen' rather than 'protected minority' (*dhimmi*) was increasingly used to refer to non-Muslims. This new concept gained currency for two reasons. Firstly, the political discourse articulated in this period was influenced by the European Enlightenment, or *nahda*, and 'reform' was a byword of this discourse, directed at the areas of language, religion, society, government, education, and the family[16] and advocated by intellectuals of divergent political and religious views.[17]

The second reason is found in the role of the Wafd Party and its liberal discourse, which sought to create the polity, or as Egyptian intellectual Tareq al-Bishri says, to 'Egyptianize' the national movement, part of a general desire to make the polity more 'Egyptian', incorporate the inhabitants of Egypt into a single political entity, and find an appropriate formulation to affirm the strong sense of cohesion among the inhabitants of Egypt.[18]

One of the most significant manifestations of the 1919 Revolution was the slogan 'Egypt for the Egyptians', which had previously been championed by Ahmed Orabi. In this common struggle uniting all minority communities under the banner of the Wafd, there was no room for terms like 'protected minority' or 'minority'; the shared objective of all was to force the British occupation out of Egypt. It was this vision of common struggle that inspired many Orientalists to describe this struggle as unprecedented in Egypt's modern history, with Jews, Copts, and Muslims overcoming existing tensions and divisions in service of a single goal.[19] The common struggle under the Wafd brought about the end of the British protectorate in Egypt in 1922 and also gave rise to the representative constitutional order of 1923. Although criticisms could be levelled against both of these developments, they nevertheless constituted an important step for the political and social development of the following years.[20]

The first product of the constitutional order was the formation of the 1923 constitutional committee. The committee's thirty members included minority representatives, among them Yusuf Qattawi Pasha, the

head of the Sephardic Jewish Communal Council; Mourad Farag Bey, the head of the Karaite Jewish Communal Council; and Father Yuannas, the metropolitan of Alexandria, as well as Copts Elias Awad and Tawfiq Dous and representatives of other minorities.[21]

The committee stressed the importance of independence and the need for religious liberties. Drawing on the values of the Enlightenment discourse and the principles of citizenship, representatives of minority communities, especially Jews and Copts, refused to refer to themselves in the constitution as minorities.[22] Their stance clearly demonstrates how deeply the nationalist discourse had penetrated and to what degree the idea of a citizenship-based polity had taken hold (and here I mean a particularly Egyptian polity).[23]

The minutes of its meetings show that the committee discussed religious freedom issues at length, debating how to articulate these freedoms in keeping with liberal principles and human rights. Two issues in the constitution are especially worth highlighting because they are revealing of the identity of state and society in this period and reflect their attitudes about minorities living in Egypt. At the same time, these two issues highlight the state's diligent attempts to lay the foundation for a secular state that separated religion and state and treated all its citizens equally, demonstrating as well how the issue of religion was conceived at the time. The first issue concerns freedom of belief and equal rights for all Egyptians based on the principle of citizenship, while the second concerns the judicial system for minority communities.

In regard to the first, Article 12 of the 1923 constitution provided for absolute freedom of belief.[24] According to some sources on the draft of the constitution and the committee's minutes, Ali Maher Bey insisted on a distinction between belief and practice, believing that mixing these two things could give some people an excuse to engage in practices to suppress freedom of belief. Maher believed that freedom of belief was key to the establishment of the modern Egyptian state and that such freedom should be absolute. No qualification should be attached to it, he thought, lest it negate its very meaning. Based on this principle, freedom of practice can be defined as that which the law does not criminalize.[25]

In the view of the committee members, by upholding absolute freedom of belief, they had firmly established this principle for all successive laws that would shape the identity and political system of Egypt. In the end, Article 12 in its final form guaranteed freedom of belief. At the same time, with the approval of the minority representatives who refused to be referred to as minorities in the constitution, and acting on the basis of citizenship and the national polity, Article 149 of the constitution stated that Islam was the religion of state and Arabic its official language.[26] The 1923 constitution thus contained all provisions for ensuring equal rights for all Egyptians regardless of religion, race, or language, including freedom of religious belief and the freedom to practice one religion.[27]

The second issue, discussed by the subsidiary committee in its ninth meeting, was the matter of giving jurisdiction to religious courts over personal status matters, which spurred a heated debate among the committee members. With some opposed to the idea of judicial consolidation and some supportive of it, particularly in personal status matters of competence and the administration of estates, no agreement could be reached. The committee deemed it best to stay silent about the matter in the constitution, in effect preserving the jurisdiction of religious and communal courts in this matter.[28]

It nevertheless must be underscored that the section on rights and liberties in the 1923 constitution is modern and unique, and superior to many contemporary European constitutions. The articles on the system of governance and relationship between the powers were taken in their entirety from the Belgian constitution, though the king's authorities were broadened somewhat and provisions introduced to reflect Egyptian particularity, as seen in Article 149. The chapter on liberties, however, is not found in the Belgian original.[29]

Communal Courts and Diminished Citizenship

The 1923 constitution laid the early foundation for a secular state, seen in the inclusion of freedom of belief in some of its articles, as discussed above. Secularism here refers to the separation of religion and state, a principle by which the state does not interfere to force its citizens to declare a particular belief or impose any religious expression on them by force. Despite the importance of this attempt, it did encounter obstacles, which is understandable, as all new beginnings encounter barriers.

The main barrier was the inability of the state to formulate a law that treated all citizens equally and functioned as a common standard for everyone despite their differing religions. This crisis came to the fore in the matter of the communal courts. These courts had jurisdiction only over members of the community represented by the same communal council—in other words, the opposing parties had to be from the same rite. In effect, it was an arbitrary judiciary. If the opposing parties came from different rites, jurisdiction fell to the Islamic religious courts.

The communal courts were also limited by the type of personal status cases they heard, all of which were related to marital matters. Competence, custody, and guardianship were removed from their jurisdiction, and inheritance and related estate matter were placed under their jurisdiction. This requirement meant that every religious rite that did not have a communal council or a personal status code was compelled to form such a council and draft a code.[30]

Initially, the Ottoman sultan would appoint the 'rabbi pasha', known as the Chief Rabbi, because his authority extended to all Egyptian Jews. The last Chief Rabbi appointed by the Ottoman Porte was Haim Nahum Effendi (1925–1960).[31] Later, each rite had its own council, composed of clerics and intellectuals from the bourgeois class, to arbitrate on the personal status matters of its community members based on their own religious codes. The Rabbinic Jewish community had two degrees of courts, in Alexandria and Beheira, while in the Karaite community, cases were heard by only one degree of courts. The Chief Rabbi had deputies in Alexandria, Damanhour, Kafr al-Zayyat, Tanta, Mahalla, and Port Said to hear Jewish cases. In 1887, the government also approved the creation of the Council of Cairo Jews to exercise these same authorities, but it refused to recognize the Ashkenazi courts.

Here we see the state taking contradictory positions toward minority communities. The Egyptian state limited its official recognition of Jewish communities to the Rabbinic Sephardic rite and so it naturally recognized that rite's courts. While the state did officially recognize the courts of the Karaite community, it did not grant Egyptian citizenship to many Karaite Jews so they remained without official documents or identity papers, similar to the Bedouin in many Arab countries today.

The community was not large—about 4,000 people in 1928[32]—but the state did recognize its communal courts. In my view, this is attributable to the members of these communities, particularly from the bourgeois class, who enjoyed influence and strong ties with the state, which prompted the state to recognize their communal courts as a kind of courtesy. The Sephardic community had strong ties to the state—the head of the communal council, Yusuf Qattawi, was appointed a minister for two successive terms and chosen as a member of the constitutional committee—and the same is true of the head of the Karaite communal council, Mourad Farag Bey, who was the khedive's lawyer and also appointed to the constitutional committee. These people's personal relationships played an important role in securing state recognition for their respective communal courts. The dearth of influential persons among the Ashkenazi community may have been a factor in the lack of official or judicial recognition.

A substantial shift took place with the 1923 constitution: it upheld the principle of citizenship and freedom of belief, and on this basis terms like 'protected minority' or 'people of the book' fell into disuse.

It also constituted a significant step toward a secular system based on citizenship. Nevertheless, the effort fell short when it came to consolidating the judiciary, abolishing the communal courts, and replacing them with a secular, uniform judicial system as warranted by contemporary developments. There were initially attempts to consolidate the system, but the opposition this faced from within the affected communities themselves made it difficult to implement. Seeking to avoid a potential clash, the government tasked religious communities with preparing internal bylaws and a personal status code, seeing in this a step toward the reform of the communal councils.

A committee was formed in 1934 to draft a law regulating the jurisdiction of personal status courts for non-Muslims. The result, Law 40/1936, retained the jurisdiction of the courts for recognized religious communities and provided for the courts to be organized in line with bylaws approved by the government, which were to be submitted with a copy of the rite's personal status law. In 1937, the communal councils were granted the right to rule on personal status matters for non-Muslims, if religious law applied.[33] As an example, Mourad Farag Bey, the president of the Karaite Communal Council in 1935, drafted the bylaws and personal status code for the Karaite rite. In 1937, he sent the text, titled *The Book of Religious Rulings*, to the Interior Ministry, which approved it in 1940.

Giving religious communities the right to adjudicate personal status matters created a contradiction with the constitution and its guarantees for freedom of belief. For example, in 1941, a member of the Karaite community left it for the Rabbinic rite. After some time, the individual sought to return to the Karaite rite, but the communal council considered him an apostate.[34] And this is not the only story of this kind. In inter-rite marriages—what Jewish sources at the time called 'marriage to foreigners', deeming the marriage of Jews from different rites illicit—the *Ittihad al-Isra'ili* newspaper reported that a Karaite Jew wanted to marry a member of the Sephardic Rabbinic rite and solicited the communal council's opinion on the matter. Mourad Farag Bey, the council president, approved the marriage without consulting the council. Angered by this, the council convened to take measures against its president, even accusing him of wanting to destroy the community and its religion, history, and heritage.[35]

This attitude reflects the contradiction facing members of the minority rite as well as the state. The state, though it authored a constitution superior in some respects to contemporary European constitutions, proved unable to consolidate the courts and abolish religious communal courts. This communal judicial system was not consistent with the concept of nationality or citizenship as articulated in the constitution, insofar as it treated people differently based on their religion, even if they were citizens of the same country.

Religion in the 1923 Constitution

As noted above, in Article 149, the constitutional committee affirmed Islam as the official state religion and Arabic as the state's primary language, which was reasonable and consistent with a social context in which Islam was the religion of the majority. The constitution only affirmed that Islam was the official religion; it defined no role for it in legislation or in determining the identity of the state and its institutions. As such, Islam played no role in personal status matters like marriage, divorce, and inheritance, which were addressed or adjudicated by the communal councils. This stands in contrast to the 1971 constitution under President Anwar Sadat, which added a provision defining Islamic law as the principal source of legislation and so giving it a role in law making and in public life generally.[36]

The 1923 constitution also specified Arabic as the official state language. In the historical context in which the constitution was written, this was meaningful. The liberal elite who helped draft the constitution were nationalists who asserted that linguistic and geographic and historical continuity—that is, a connection

through time and place—was the bond uniting Egyptians into a single polity despite their different religions.[37] This elite sought to set itself apart from the religious current, which claimed that Islam was the common political factor uniting all Muslims in Egypt and the world. This trend included people like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, Sheikh Rashid Rida, and Mustafa Kamel, the head of the National Party, who saw no contradiction between national affiliation and religious identity.[38]

It is noteworthy that the 1923 constitution was drafted under the British occupation. Egyptian nationalism in this period thus acted as the vessel containing and giving form to the national liberation movement against colonialism, a role that Islam, then represented by the Ottoman state, could not play. For this reason, religion was moot for the elite framers of the constitution, as they were not convinced of the relevance of religious affiliation in the struggle against colonialism.

The nationalist orientation of the elite (while granting that the modern articulation of nationalism came from the West) led them, when laying the groundwork for the first secular constitution in Egypt's modern history, to exclude religion from the public debate and make a clear institutional separation between religion and state. This effort could have been developed and built on further; however, it encountered many obstacles and collapsed completely with the military coup in 1952 and the army's assumption to power.

Importantly, this liberal elite was influenced by a discourse of enlightenment or renaissance, which was widespread at the time (and gave rise to nationalism among other things), and so engaged in an enlightened critique of religion of all kinds. This key belief of modern liberalism was central to the early writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, which were informed by the French Revolution and in young Hegelians' critique of religion as well, and this critique can be seen in relation to Max Weber's church-sect distinction.

Weber posited that a religion lacking official state recognition is transformed from a church into a voluntary association—a sect or the so-called free churches—and from an official religion to a belief or faith community. From the perspective of the modern state (which is secular by its very nature since it sees from the perspective of the state), all churches and sects are either schools of belief or voluntary federations in the form of churches (meaning faith communities) or sects.[39] This is made utterly clear in the way the Egyptian state acted at the time. While it granted official recognition to certain rites or sects along with recognition of their courts, it withheld official recognition from other sects, although it did recognize their judicial system in the form of the communal courts.

This demonstrates that the attempt to secularize the state did not incline to a total separation of religion and state or the liberation of religion from the authority of the state, but rather sought to bring religion under the authority of the state. State recognition was therefore crucial in the classification of state-recognized religious groups as rites or sects. The example of the Jewish community is illustrative. When the Karaite Jewish community, which did not enjoy officially state recognition, was discussed, it was referred to as the Karaite Jewish rite or sect.

It must be noted that the debates about the constitution took place in a historical context in which two currents were prominent: the nationalist current, which asserted that linguistic and historical and geographic connections, or the bond of time and place, brought Egyptians together into a single polity regardless of their religious diversity, and the religious current, which affirmed Islam as the principal political factor uniting all Muslims in Egypt and the world. Moreover, the term 'the Egyptian *umma*', or nation, crystallized in opposition to British colonialism and in the context of debates in the early nineteenth century, when emphasis was increasingly placed on the *umma* as a source of sovereignty.[40] In this period, '*umma*' went from being a signifier of a multinational nation-state to indicating a single nation.[41]

Conclusion

Returning to the main question: What was the relationship between state and society in Egypt in the period under study? Firstly, taking a broad view of Egypt's modern history, in the period from 1919 to 1952, there were attempts to lay an early foundation for a secular system. While certain aspects required more in-depth debates and broader reform, this did not happen for several reasons. Taking the most expansive view, however, the reform process initiated by the political elite had a powerful influence on Egyptian society.

Secondly, 'reform' was a key term associated with the European Enlightenment discourse, directed at language, religion, society, government, education, and the family. This discourse was taken up in Egypt and the Arab world and was an important inspiration of the reform process undertaken by all minorities in Egypt in an attempt to keep pace with the age and the modern state taking shape in Egypt.

These reform attempts came to halt with the 1952 military coup, which set back all interwar efforts. Instead of citizenship, sectarianism took hold and was entrenched, seen clearly when President Sadat assumed power and inserted an article in the 1971 constitution making Islamic law a source of legislation. This provision has persisted in all Egypt's constitutions since, dashing hopes for a democratic, secular state. With the revolutionary uprising of January 2011, Egyptians again began asking the same questions posed a century earlier during the 1919 Revolution.

Thirdly, based on the foregoing review of the debates on the 1923 constitution and the elite who wrote it, we conclude that Egyptian society was more open to accepting religious and ethnic difference and that the concept of sectarianism had not yet fully emerged. These debates also underscore the historical rule played by minorities in Egypt's political, economic, and social life.

About the Author

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[1] Of course, other minorities exist in Egypt, but I mention the Copts here because today they constitute the biggest minority. Since the 1970s, sectarian tensions involving Copts have become more prevalent, and sectarianism has been cemented on various levels. The recent church construction law is a prime example of the trend.

[2] In early 1879, Abdullah al-Nadim founded a more revolutionary, emancipatory association in Alexandria known as Young Egypt. Most of its members were Christian Arabs, Egyptian Jews, and Egyptianized Italians. They advocated and defended the ideas of an Italian association founded by Mazzini, demanding civil and political freedoms, justice and equality for all before the law regardless of religious or national affiliation, and the formation of a true national government to be responsible to a representative assembly chosen in fair elections. Young Egypt had several branches in European capitals, notably Berlin and Paris. It played an important role in resisting the British occupation and was politically active in Berlin. The association helped inspire a number of Egyptian intellectuals to adopt and advocate for human rights, particularly in Paris, under the influence of the French Enlightenment discourse. These included Dr. Mahmoud Azmi, who had links to Young Egypt in Paris. In 1930–1933, he, along with several Egyptian intellectuals, founded the Egyptian Division of the Human Rights Group, which opposed dictatorship in articles published in the French press. For more information on the role of Mahmoud Azmi, see Abd al-Rahman, Awatif, and Najwa Kamel (1997) *Tarikh al-Sahafa al-Misriya: Dirasa Tarikhiya wa Mu'asira* [The History of the Egyptian Press: A Historical and Contemporary Study] (Cairo), p. 282.

[3] HADITU, the Democratic Movement for National Liberation (1944–1965), was an Egyptian communist organization, founded by Henry Curiel, which brought together two older communist organizations, ISKRA and the Democratic Movement for National Liberation. Several parties and organizations grew out of HADITU, including today's Egyptian Communist Party and the Tagammu Party. A great number of the latter's leadership were originally HADITU members, including Khaled Mohieddin, Eryan Nassif, Hussein Abd Rabbo, and Rifaat Said.

[4] After the Balfour Declaration was released in 1927, Mosseri organized a celebration in Cairo, attended by some 3,000 people, among them members of the Karaite rite. In 1928, a similar celebration in Alexandria was attended by nearly 8,000 people. In the same year, the Committee for Palestine was established in Alexandria, to support Balfour's pledge to resettle Jews in Palestine. Mosseri, also the head of the Zionist Federation in Egypt that was formed in this period, was the most important figure in the Zionist movement in Egypt, acting as a liaison between Zionist groups in Egypt and Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952), the president of the World Zionist Organization, and dedicating himself to the recruitment of new members to the Zionist movement. For more on Mosseri's activities in the Zionist movement, see Laskier, Michael (1992) *The Jews of Egypt 1920–1970: In the Midst of Zionism, Anti-Semitism, and the Middle East Conflict* (New York: New York University Press).

[5] Beinin, Joel (1998) *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of the Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

[6] Sephardic communities spoke Ladino as well as French, Italian, or Arabic while immigrants from other European nations spoke the language of their mother tongue (Greek Jews spoke Greek, Italian Jews Italian, etc.). Hebrew occupied a special place, and most Jews in Egypt likely spoke it because it was the liturgical language, though there was of course a minority that did not and spoke fluent French. This linguistic diversity was reflective of the composition of the larger Egyptian society.

[7] New History (Nouvelle Histoire) is a historical methodology that deviates from conventional historical studies in its reliance on different types of historical sources, such as civil records, oral history, and material culture. New History also centers more marginal or less visible social groups in history, such as the insane, shepherds, thieves, and prostitutes. See LeGoff, Jacques (2007) *al-Tarikh al-Jadid* [Nouvelle Histoire], translated by Mohammed al-Taher al-Mansouri (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies).

[8] In his *Prison Notebooks*, Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony to describe how a minority exercises control over another group through money, and he extended the concept of hegemony to apply to diverse fields like economics, culture, religion, anthropology, psychology, and linguistics. Gramsci (1991) *Gefängnishefte*.

[9] Tignor, Robert (1987) 'Egyptian Jewry, Communal Tension, and Zionism', in Shimon Shamir (ed.) *The Jews of Egypt, a Mediterranean Society in Modern Times* (Boulder: Westview Press).

[10] Regarding freedom of the press, newspapers were first published in Egypt in the age of Mohammed Ali, when the first newspaper, *al-Waqa'i' al-Misriya*, was issued in 1828. In addition, the British occupation modernized Egypt's administration and infrastructure and was not opposed to free expression. As such, numerous newspapers were published in this period, including the leading *al-Ahram*, which first appeared in 1867. The adoption of the 1923 constitution further encouraged freedom of expression and the press. From 1924 to 1952, 237 newspapers were published, 200 of them in Arabic and the rest in various languages spoken by minorities in Egypt; of these, the Jewish minority accounted for most. The foreign press also played a role in the spread of the press in Egypt. French journalists, for example, supported the publication of Egyptian papers against the British occupation, giving Egyptians necessary funds and technology. With the exception of the 1956 constitution, all Egypt's constitutions from 1923 to the constitutional declaration of 2011 guaranteed freedom of the press, though with restrictions. The exception is the 1954 draft constitution, which prohibited restrictions on licensing of newspapers and barred their notification, suspension, or confiscation by administrative order. The 1923 and 1930 constitutions prohibited press censorship and the notification or suspension of newspapers by administrative order except when necessary to protect the social order. The 1930 constitution added a provision allowing for their temporary suspension if they violated the sanctity of morals, threatened to expose the constitutional order to hatred or contempt, or endangered the public peace. Although the 1971 constitution and the 2011 constitutional declaration barred the notification, suspension, or annulment of newspapers by administrative decree, they permitted censorship in times of emergency or war in matters related to public safety or national security.

[11] See *al-Shams* newspaper, particularly issues published in 1944, on the activities of schools associated with the Alliance Israélite Universelle. Rodrigue, Aron (1993) *The Image of Sephardim and Eastern Jews in Transition, the Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle 1869–1939* (Washington: University of Washington).

[12] Krämer, Gudrun (1982) *Minderheit, Millet, Nation? Die Juden in Ägypten 1914–1952)* (Weisbaden).

[13] Tignor, Robert (1998) *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire: State and Business in Decolonizing Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya 1945–1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

[14] Tignor (1998).

[15] Gudrun (1982).

[16] Levy, Lital (2012) 'Edification between Sect and Nation: Murad Farag and al-Tahdhib 1901–1903, in Mohammed Bamyeh (ed.) *Intellectuals and Civil Society in the Middle East: Liberalism, Modernity and Political Discourse* (New York: I.B. Tauris).

[17] The term 'nahda', meaning renaissance or awakening, had general and specific meanings in Egypt at this time. As the discourse of liberation from British colonialism was being shaped in the framework of a general renaissance and its manifestations, the term had narrower meaning as well, taken up by every minority community (particularly the Jewish and Coptic minorities). Here the term referred to reforming the community and its laws and reviving the community's language. The Jewish community, for example, attempted to revive Hebrew through the establishment of Jewish schools, which coincided with Zionism's emphasis on the revival of the language. Other efforts to reform the communal councils and matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance were also undertaken in the framework of a 'nahda', which was synonymous with modernity.

[18] Al-Bishri, Tareq (1980) *al-Muslimun wa-l-Aqbat fi Itar al-Jama'a al-Wataniya* [Muslims and Copts in the Framework of the National Community] (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization).

[19] Gudrun.

[20] Al-Bishri (1980).

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] On the national community and elements and the distinction between the national and religious community, see Bishri, Tareq (1998) *Fi al-Mas'ala al-Islamiya al-Mu'asira: Bayn al-Jami'a al-Diniya wa-l-Jami'a al-Wataniya fi-l-Fikr al-Siyasi* [On the Contemporary Islamic Question: Between the Religious Community and the National Community in Political Thought] (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq).

[24] The 1971 constitution was amended under President Sadat to include a provision making Islamic law (*shari'a*) the principal source of legislation, which eroded the principles of equality and foundation for a secular order. Article 43 stated that freedom of belief was protected, and there is a clear distinction between 'protected' and 'absolute'. After the January revolution, the 2014 constitution returned to the old formulation, stating that freedom of belief is absolute and that the freedom to engage in religious rites and establish houses of worship for adherents of the revealed religions is a right regulated by law. Compare the 1923 constitution with other Egyptian constitutions at http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org/egyptian-constitution-arabic/, accessed 16 March 2019.

[25] Shalakany, Amr (2013) *Izdihar wa Inhiyar al-Nukhba al-Qanuniya al-Misriya* [The Flourishing and Collapse of the Egyptian Legal Elite] (Cairo).

[26] Al-Bishri (1980), p. 174.

[27] See Article 13 of the constitution and al-Bishri (1980), p. 199.

[28] Al-Bishri (1980), p. 174.

[29] Shalakany (2013).

[30] Mohammed Salem, Latifa (2010) *al-Nizam al-Qada'i al-Misri al-Hadith* [The Modern Egyptian Judicial System], pt. 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq), p. 262.

[31] There is a misconception that Naoum Effendi was the last high rabbi of Egyptian Jews. In fact, he was the last high rabbi appointed by the Ottoman state. The last high rabbi was Haim Moussa Douek, who left Egypt in March 1972 for France. In October that same year, he immigrated to the US, where he settled in New York. There he was active in the Ahaba ve Ahva Association, which he helped found in Egypt. He died in 1974. For more information about him and his religious activity, see Alkhatib, Taqadum (2019) 'Das kulturelle Leben der ägyptischen Juden in der Diaspora', accessed 16 March 2020, http://www.orientokzident.de/index.php?filename=publikationen_religioese_minderheiten.htm.

[32] From the *al-Ittihad al-Isra'ili*, a newspaper published by the Karaite Communal Council, 1927. Citing the Egyptian Statistical Bureau, the newspaper reported that the population of Karaite Jews in Egypt in 1917–1927 was roughly 4,000.

[33] Mohammed Salem (2010), p. 262.

[34] Ibid, p. 263.

[35] *al-Ittihad al-Isra'ili* (1925), no. 7, p. 6.

[36] For an in-depth discussion of Article 2 of the constitution and practical problems in application, see Brown, Nathan (2012) 'Egypt and Islamic Sharia: A Guide for the Perplexed', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed 1 May 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/15/egypt-and-islamic-sharia-guide-for-perplexed-pub-48119.

[37] Al-Bishri (1998).

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[38] For more on the Islamic current and its beginnings and influence, see al-Jabiri, Mohammed Abed (1979) *al-Khitab al-'Arabi al-Mu'asir* [Contemporary Arab Discourse] (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center; Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a).

[39] Kurse, Volker (2018) *Geschichte der Soziologie* (Munich).

[40] Madeley, John (2003) 'European Liberal Democracy and the Principle of State Religious Neutrality', *West European Politics* 26 (1), p. 9.

[41] The influence of Bruno Bauer must be noted here. A student of Hegel, he grounded his view of the liberation of religious minorities in the separation of religion and state as well as political liberation and equal citizenship. In other words, he linked the response to the complaints of inequality by Jewish and other minorities to political emancipation and the separation of religion and state. This may have led several Egyptian Jews at the time to assert the separation of religion and state in the constitution. See Sibertin-Blanc, Guillaume (2011) *al-Falsafa al-Siyasiya fi-l-Qarnayn al-Tasi' 'Ashar wa-l-'Ishrin* [Political Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries], translated by Ezz al-Din al-Khitabi (Beirut: Arab Organization for Translation), p. 120.