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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**The Church in the Square: Negotiations of
Religion and Revolution at an Evangelical Church
in Cairo, Egypt**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Egyptology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

In Sociology – Anthropology

By **Anna Jeannine Dowell**

Under the supervision of **Dr John Schaefer**

May/ 2012

ABSTRACT

The American University in Cairo

Anna Jeannine Dowell

“The Church in the Square: Negotiations of Religion and Revolution at an Evangelical Church in Cairo, Egypt”

Supervised by Dr. John Schaefer

In the wake of the Egyptian January 25, 2011 popular uprisings that deposed Hosni Mubarak from the presidency, youth and leaders from *Kanisset Kasr el Dohara* (KDEC) in Tahrir Square embarked on new and unpredictable political projects and activisms. This ethnographic study is an engagement with these new revolutionary negotiations on the part of the largest Protestant congregation in the Middle East. Using participant observation, focus groups, and interviews this research seeks to elucidate the ways that youth and leaders utilized institutionalized discourse, religious imagery, and relational networks in order to carve out a place in the Egyptian public sphere regarding public religion, national belonging, and the ideal citizen. Broadly this research seeks to understand how Evangelical Egyptians at KDEC navigated their colonial heritage and transnational character even as their leadership sought to ground the congregation in the Egyptian nation-state and in the emerging post-revolutionary political scene. I argue that these negotiations were built upon powerful paradoxes concerning liberal politics, secularism, and private versus public religion, which often implicated Evangelicals in the same questions being raised more broadly in the Egyptian political sphere concerning Islamist politics and religious minorities. These negotiations also serve as a significant departure from the political posture and intervention of the much larger Coptic Orthodox establishment in Egypt. This project contributes to literature on the formation of religious subjectivity and political imaginaries, the nexus between Protestantism and modernity, as well as the role and future of public religions, especially as these topics are being pursued in the anthropology of Christianity.

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CHAPTER 1: THE CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

Al-Kanīsa al-Injīlīyya bi-Kasr al-Dubara (Kasr el Dobra Evangelical Church) sits behind a high metal gate clad in Ramadan-style festive material that, along with a row of tall slender trees, obscures the view of the main courtyard from pedestrians passing by on Sheikh Rihan Street in downtown Cairo. Once inside the gate and standing in the spacious courtyard, one gets a sense of the size of the building that is impossible to discern from the street. The back of the austere, blocky and imposing Mugamma, a 14-story complex that holds most government agency offices and is known for its endless bureaucracy and inefficiency, faces toward Sheikh Rihan Street and effectively dwarfs the church building. As the story goes, in 1948 when groundbreaking for this ambitious church was planned, all church construction had to be directly approved by the monarch, King Farouk. Due to personal pressures from foreign missionaries with political connections, the King begrudgingly gave permission for the construction of the church right on Tahrir Square. It is said that after King Farouk saw the size and beauty of the building he called for the large architectural eyesore that is the Mugamma to be raised so as to diminish the church's physical presence *in* Tahrir Square. A favorite anecdote among Evangelical Egyptians connected with Kasr el Dobra Evangelical Church (KDEC), this story poignantly illustrates that the struggle to be the "Church in the Square" has been a central part of this particular church's history, as well as its contemporary moment.

This thesis project explores the way that congregants of KDEC, especially youth and youth leaders, became “The Church in the Square” by negotiating the political and revolutionary upheaval of 2011 to early 2012 in Egypt. Broadly, I am interested in how Evangelical Egyptians navigate their history as a Protestant church established by Anglo-American missionaries during the height of British imperialism and in relation to contemporary questions circulating in the Egyptian public sphere, especially questions about public religion and the appropriate relationship between religion and the state. In particular I am interested in the way that the political imaginaries created by institutionalized discourses at this church made possible certain conceptions of revolutionary intervention, the ideal citizen, national belonging and unity during this tumultuous period in Egypt.

During the 2011 Tahrir Square protests in Egypt that toppled the regime of President Hosni Mubarak, ubiquitous slogans emphasized unity among Egyptians, especially between the people and the army, but also significantly between Christians and Muslims. Copts surrounding Muslims while they prayed and Muslims protecting the entrances of churches during Mass became embodied performances of the ‘joined hands’ chant commonly used by protesters. These images of unity and religious tolerance contributed to a certain *ethos* of revolutionary Tahrir Square, a performance of liberalism and democratic aspirations. But this presentation contrasted with much of the international media coverage. Leading political scientists, media commentators and area specialists were wont to see behind these demands the invisible hand of radical Islam, repeatedly insisting that there was nowhere for this movement to come from and nowhere for it to go toward except radical and militant Islam. This same anxiety that surrounded

the 18 days in Tahrir Square continued to undergird many of the conversations and events that followed the historic uprising. It is in this context that Egyptians state and non-state actors attempt to negotiate a new political trajectory in the midst of national and global discourses that are preoccupied with the question of secularism and public religion.

In these charged debates, however, analyzing the way that Egypt's Christian communities use institutionalized discourse, church authority, and religious commitment to create certain possibilities for political subjectivity and activism is a peripheral concern. Most often, when the press acknowledges Christian political involvement it is in the form of sentimentalized stories of unity and nationalist feeling or statements of political marginalization. In contrast to such limited and static representations, this research project seeks to understand the active political and social role that Evangelical Christians from this influential and highly visible church imagine and perform, as they negotiate, through discourses and actions, their religious and revolutionary commitments in contemporary Egypt. In particular, the members of KDEC are fiercely committed to their unique reading of secular-liberal democratic values and a religiously informed participation in political systems. I contend that the processes of political negotiation and activism of Egyptian Evangelicals is an important and productive angle from which to ask how religious discourses sustain political imaginaries inhabitable by certain kinds of religious subjects.

KASR EL DOBARA EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The Delta Presbytery of the Synod of the Nile is the legacy of the missionary activity of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA). The first

UPCNA missionaries set foot on Egyptian soil in 1854 to begin their part in the wider Anglo-American Protestant missions movement that was spreading across the globe (Sharkey 2006). The success of these Anglo-American missionaries was almost exclusively limited to Coptic Orthodox communities; conversion from Muslim families was negligible. In part because of this dynamic, the stronghold of the Evangelical mission was mainly rural Upper Egypt, especially around Asyut –the area of Egypt with the highest Orthodox concentrations (2006:172). The rapid urbanization of Egypt in the mid-twentieth century, however, brought with it the urbanization of the Evangelical population. Drawing on anecdotal evidence and personal correspondence, historian Heather Sharkey suggested that in 2006 about half of the Evangelical population of Egypt was living in urban centers like Cairo and Alexandria (2006:178). Pre-eminent among these urbanized Evangelical congregations is Kasr el Dohara Evangelical Church (KDEC), established in 1948 by the Delta Presbytery of the Synod of the Nile. Owing to its central urban location and talented preaching staff, it now boasts around seven thousand members. The largest Protestant congregation in the Middle East., KDEC is an affluent Evangelical church with a mostly middle-upper or middle class congregation. As a large, well-known, and easily accessible church, however, it has congregants from many socio-economic positions and educational backgrounds. The pastors and elders of the church are all highly educated and many of the youth that I encountered were college educated and proficient in English. This demographic make-up of KDEC allowed me to conduct interviews primarily in English.

The lead pastor of KDEC is Pastor Sameh Maurice, who has held that position since 2008. Pastor Sameh was a trained medical doctor before becoming a professional

minister at KDEC.¹ He is a very charismatic public speaker, loved and respected widely by those I spoke and worked with in the congregation for his humility, articulateness, boldness, and willingness to use innovative and ambitious projects to draw people to the church.

As one of my interlocutors who did not go to KDEC but was deeply involved with the broader Evangelical establishment in Egypt told me, “Kasr el Dohara is a church that you can’t be neutral about.” Its enormously successful youth ministry and network of small mentoring groups is seen by some as evidence of its cutting-edge ministry style and by others, especially pastors of smaller Evangelical churches in the Cairo area, as prospering at the expense of the youth ministries of their congregations. Primarily because of its connections with the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, which has been called a neo-charismatic evangelical ministry, KDEC is also seen as far more charismatic than most Evangelical churches in Egypt. Many people told me in the early days of my fieldwork that KDEC was such an attractive church to many Evangelicals because its worship was free and expressive and that you “could sense the Holy Spirit” there in a way that was absent from other churches. While the services at KDEC do not involve slaying in the spirit or publicly performed healings or speaking in tongues, the leadership and congregants that I interacted with showed a strong belief in the reality of supernatural healing of bodily diseases, the spiritual gift of speaking in

¹ Pastor Menes Abdel Noor, who preceded him as lead pastor, offered his bid for retirement in 2008 but the church asked him to stay on as honorary pastor while Pastor Sameh took on the main obligations of the head pastor.

tongues to be exercised in one's personal prayer-life, spirit possession, and prophetic words in the life of the modern-day church.

The church owns a large sprawling retreat center called *Bait al-Wadi* in Wadi el-Natrun, an hour and a half outside of Cairo.² The center hosts church retreats, international teaching seminars for church leaders, and a few times a year large-scale conferences that attract thousands of attendees. The church also owns a hospital that is staffed by doctors from the congregation, and supports a sizable staff at all levels of church administration as well as overseas workers. The largest services at KDEC are broadcast on two T.V. channels –SAT7 and *Mu'agiza* –and a number of the leaders, including Pastor Sameh Maurice, have weekly teaching series on topics of Christian living that are aired on these stations throughout the region and are available worldwide through the Internet.

During the 18-day protest that toppled Hosni Mubarak from the presidency, KDEC became known as “the Church in the Square.” In large part owing to its central location in Tahrir Square, its members held services and spoke in the Square alongside Copts, secularists, and Muslims. Youth groups from KDEC organized trash pick-up and food distribution, and the leadership allowed their property to be used for strategy meetings for protest organizers. Indeed, on February 16, just days after Mubarak's

² Located in the eastern desert of the Nile Delta, Wadi el-Natrun is one of the ancient sites of early Coptic monasticism. Unlike the other Egyptian sites that now have only archaeological remains, Wadi el-Natrun still is home to a variety of monastic orders and monasteries. This location for *Bait al-Wadi* serves to anchor it the landscape of Egyptian Coptic Christianity but it also provides a stark distinction between these ancient, quiet and modest orders, and the multi-million Egyptian-pound retreat center, replete with a high ropes course, giant amphitheater, swimming pool, and conference rooms.

removal from power, a memorial service for the Martyrs of the Revolution at Kasr el Dobra honored Christian and Muslim dead. Islam Lotfi, who was at that time a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, gave the main address (Knickmeyer 2011). This kind of public involvement with the protest movements and activist communities has brought significant media coverage to what many leaders and congregants now call “the Tahrir Church” and has also shaped the way that KDEC members see their own enmeshment in this revolutionary moment in Cairo.³

Throughout 2011 there were several significant incidents of Muslim-Christian hostility and violence, events that figured prominently in Egyptian media under the nomenclature of ‘sectarianism’ in Egypt and its relation to the Mubarak regime.⁴ But as the memorial service demonstrates, there was also an increase in inter-religious political cooperation since January 25, echoing the language and presentation of Tahrir Square. A look at the histories of these various communities (Muslim, Coptic, Evangelical) reveals

³ Ehab el-Kharrat, a psychiatrist and elder at KDEC since the early 1980s, has been one of the most respected and visible members of KDEC in both the revolutionary protests but also as a co-founder and leading member of one of the largest liberal political parties of the transition period, The Social Democratic Party. Unfortunately, Dr. el-Kharrat does not figure in this ethnography for a couple of reasons. First, Dr. el-Kharrat has quite a high position of leadership at the church, as well as in the Social Democratic Party. This means that the interlocutors with whom I spent time, with the exception of the church leaders on the Political Activism Committee that I will introduce later, have little contact personally or institutionally with Dr. el-Kharrat. Second, I tried to contact Dr. el-Kharrat unsuccessfully toward the end of my research but was unsuccessful in reaching him. There is so much that such a dedicated member of both the church and the Egyptian political scene could have added to the nuances of this project but elisions like this are part of doing fieldwork in this moment in Cairo when many individuals have such important political and social commitments.

⁴ Even before the January uprising, there was a midnight Mass church bombing in Alexandria. On March 4 in Manshayet Nasser there were violent clashes between Christians and Muslims and on May 9 in Imbaba, a poor neighborhood in Cairo, 12 people were killed, over two hundred injured, and two churches and many shops and homes set alight. (see Shenoda 2011) The most traumatic event happened, however, in October 27, 2011 when the military attacked a Coptic protest, killing 27 Coptic Christians, many of whom had been run over by military tanks.

deep ambivalences, resonances, alliances, and implications that continue to have ramifications for these present-day negotiations of national belonging, good citizenship, and the role of public religion.

ANGLO-AMERICAN MISSIONARIES AND THE COLONIAL MOMENT

Historian Heather Sharkey has done a great deal of work on the Anglo-American missionaries to Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. She focuses on the impact of Anglo-American missionary work on the modern Middle Eastern political landscape and the resultant tensions between the former colonial powers and the states of the Middle East. She has written extensively about the strong rhetorical and political connection between Western imperialist powers (the British in Egypt beginning 1882) and the Protestant mission movement of the late nineteenth century. In fact, she argues that the period between 1882 and 1932 is considered the height of Anglo-American Protestant missionary activity, and as that period coincided with imperialistic governing in Egypt, it was common for missionaries to reflect that militaristic mindset in their “language of battle-readiness, conquest, and warfare to describe their work and to rally supporters” (2005:46).

Against this historical backdrop of U.S. American missions in the age of Western imperialism, Evangelical Egyptians have had to negotiate their own political subjectivity within an Egyptian state that is widely influenced by the very Islamist politics developed by Muslim charity and political associations, like the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which

formed largely in response to the colonial moment in Egyptian history.⁵ How do Evangelicals in Egypt engage the political debates and alliances of this revolutionary moment, in which anti-colonial discourse (evidenced by strong anti-U.S. rhetoric from some sectors) and nationalist feeling (“Egypt is above all of us”) run deep and are an important impetus for all kinds of politics –secularist, Islamic, and Christian? And how is the evangelical Protestantism to which these Egyptians are committed influence their political imaginaries and the political projects they choose to enact?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study of political and religious negotiations at KDEC finds itself at the intersection of three main bodies of literature. The first is the newly burgeoning field of the anthropology of Christianity, which highlights how “christianities” are marked by radical rupture from past cultural and religious affiliations, by complex hierarchies and by a stubborn under-theorization in anthropology. The second comprises a smaller body of literature by anthropologists, political scientists, and historians on evangelicalism in the global south. This literature is heavily pre-occupied with conversion, missionaries, and imperialism, emphasizing the relative newness of evangelicalism in the global south in the last half-century and the crises of authenticity and spuriousness that have ensued. The third body of literature is the work on politics and evangelicalism in the global south that draws mainly from Paul Freston’s exhaustive *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (2001) and the continental collections on evangelicals and

⁵ See Sharkey 2005 for an examination of the colonial-missionary alliances and how that moment made possible a certain type of Islamist mobilization.

democracy published through the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY

In his influential article “What is a Christian? Toward an anthropology of Christianity” (2003), Joel Robbins calls for the establishment of an anthropology of Christianity *for itself*, which he distinguished from an anthropology of Christianity *in itself*. The latter, he contends, has been around as long as anthropologists were writing ethnographies about Christian communities, but the former, “a self-conscious, comparative project” in which scholars of Christianity both foreground Christian practice and belief in their analysis and are conversant with analyses of “christianities” in other geographical regions, had yet to develop (2003:192). In a subsequent publication, Robbins (2007) noted the lack of development toward an anthropology of Christianity, largely laying the blame for its belatedness on the pervasive ‘continuity thinking’ that characterizes anthropology and that is at odds with the Christian model of complete rupture and discontinuity. There is a general consensus among scholars of Christianity about the reasons for this seeming inability to develop an anthropology of Christianity. First, there are what Robbins calls cultural reasons. Drawing on Harding’s discussion of fundamentalist Christians as ‘repugnant others’ (Harding 1991). Robbins argues that anthropologists are hesitant to take Christianity seriously because of

the curious fact that Christians, almost wherever they are, appear at once too similar to anthropologists to be worthy of study and too meaningfully different to be easily made sense of by the use of standard anthropological tools. Christians are too similar by virtue of drawing on the same broad cultural tradition as anthropologists, and too meaningfully different by virtue of drawing on a part of

that tradition that in many respects has arisen in critical dialogue with the modernist ideas on which anthropology is founded. (Robbins 2003:192)⁶

In addition to these cultural difficulties, Robbins argues that this project runs up against a theoretical and empirical difficulty common to all comparative projects: Given the widely divergent practices of Christianity in the world, how can Christianity be a coherent object of analysis for comparative study? In this regard, Robbins suggests that the model of the anthropology of Islam, a successful comparative project, shows that comparative ethnographic projects can be achieved without resorting to cultural essentialism (2003:194).⁷

In the wake of these clarion calls, a number of edited volumes on Christian communities have since dealt with the special areas of concern that Robbins notes: cultural rupture, authority, and the paradoxical relationship between the transcendental and material. The compilation *The Anthropology of Christianity* (2006), edited by Fenella Cannell, includes nine ethnographic studies of Protestant and Catholic communities in the global south and is the most influential collection of works explicitly directed toward this project. As Cannell notes in her introduction, the contributors to this volume consider their work directly conversant with Robbins's call for a more self-conscious community of scholars who foreground the analysis of Christian symbolic worlds, practices, and beliefs even as they engage broader topics of anthropological concern.

⁶ See Cannell (2006) and Garriott & O'Neill (2008) for a re-iteration of this cultural difficulty.

⁷ Whereas Robbins sees the usefulness of an anthropology of Christianity in the analysis of Christianity's "cultural logic," other scholars are pushing for a more "dialogic" approach to the comparative project that would foreground the question, "Who is a Christian?" as it is asked by informants and anthropologists (Garriott and O'Neill 2008).

My theoretical concerns with improvisation, spuriousness and authenticity, and the making of politico-religious subjects are all explicitly or implicitly directed to the question of cultural rupture in Christianity. In addition, by addressing its methodology to youth and church leaders, this ethnographic study is poised to offer a contribution to authority structures and subject making. Cannell begins her introduction with the oft-quoted question: “What difference does Christianity make?”(2006:1). This ethnography attempts to answer that question in a region negligibly represented in that literature (with the notable exception of Shenoda 2010) by highlighting the rhetoric of authenticity and national belonging, the structures of church authority, and the negotiation of political activism and religiosity (an iteration of the Christian paradox of transcendence and materiality) in this Evangelical community.

EVANGELICALS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The word ‘evangelical’ has held numerous meanings in its complicated and confusing history, but I use it here with a particular history and definition in mind. These are essential to understanding the location (at once historical, geographical, and religious) of KDEC and, therefore, the kinds of political subjectivities it makes possible.

Historically, evangelicalism is understood as “a renewal movement within historic Christian orthodoxy with deep roots in the early Church, the reformation of the sixteenth century, and the great awakenings of the eighteenth century” (George 2006:15).

‘Evangelicalism’ is notoriously difficult to operationalize in research, however, because the movement is said to characterize several denominations (Baptists, Pentecostals, Non-denominational, etc.) but also includes Catholics and mainline Protestants who will self-designate as evangelical Catholics or evangelical Lutherans, etc. (de Bernardo and Lewis

2010). In the face of these scholarly debates, many important authors of work on evangelicalism in the global south like Paul Freston, author of *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (2001), and Terence O. Ranger, editor of *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa* (Ranger 2008) defer to David W. Bebbington's "quadrilateral of priorities" (1989:3) in his classic work, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*:

[C]onversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. (Bebbington 1989:2)

Formally, the church is named Kasr el Dohara Evangelical Church, and the denomination to which it belongs is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt. Notwithstanding this formal nominalism, however, a solid case can be made for considering KDEC to be an example of a global evangelical community, in line with Bebbington's aforementioned priorities and with affinity to those communities I have already mentioned.⁸

In the first place, the missionaries that founded the Evangelical churches in Egypt were, themselves, deeply evangelical. Sharkey argues that the missionaries of the UPCNA missionaries exhibited all of Bebbington's quadrilateral of priorities and expressed U.S. American cultural values in their evangelicalism especially regarding populism and disregard for church hierarchy; they "were evangelicals in the core sense of

⁸ When I refer to the religious phenomena of *evangelicalism* as a sensibility or trend in forms of practice and theology as defined by Bebbington and adopted by this study, I use the lower case *evangelical*. However, in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, most Protestant churches prefer the name *Evangelical* and use it as a denominational marker. In the case of the Egyptian Evangelical church and Egyptian Evangelicals, I use the upper case form, as is standard for denominational labels.

the term” (2008:25). The UPCNA later joined the New York PCUSA, which today is a bastion of mainline Protestantism and in the process shed many of the key characteristics of evangelicalism, in particular de-emphasizing conversionism, biblicism, and crucicentrism, and emphasizing in their stead a ‘respectful witness’ to non-believers, and social services instead of bible teaching. This trend had started in the 1920s and was in full-form by the 1960s in U.S. American congregations. As Sharkey has pointed out, this trend toward a more liberal and less evangelical orientation is evident in the writing and thinking of many Presbyterian missionaries in Egypt up until they were expelled in 1967 (2008:227). The relationship between the Egyptian Evangelical Church and the Anglo-American missionaries became more tenuous after the 1952 Free Officer’s coup, which deposed King Farouk, abolished the monarchy, and pursued an aggressively nationalist agenda. While the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt had been legally independent of the UPCNA since 1957, they more actively reinforced this independence during the 1950s and 1960s, when Nasser nationalized many foreign-controlled institutions (Sharkey 2008:210). As a result, whereas historically the UPCNA and the PCUSA can no longer be described as evangelical institutions, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt has retained the evangelicalism that marked the early Anglo-American missionaries and the earliest Evangelical Egyptian churches.

Secondly, the leadership and members of KDEC continue to exhibit many of those evangelical characteristics, especially as embodied in U.S. American evangelicalism: a confessional and personal faith, a high view of the authority of Scripture, a strong tendency away from rigid church hierarchy (especially as juxtaposed to the Coptic Orthodox Church), and a primacy of place for evangelism and social

activism amongst non-Christians. In fact, Kasr el Dobra exhibits all four of Bebbington's "quadrilateral of priorities." The programmatic structure of KDEC's weekly services resemble much more closely that of a U.S. based megachurch—with rock music and the lyrics thereof projected on the wall, spontaneous prayer times, passionate preaching, and expository bible teaching—than they do a liturgical Coptic Orthodox service or even a mainline PCUSA service. KDEC's 24-hour prayer ministry borrows very little from the ancient prayer life of the Coptic monastics, and is, in fact, closely related through funding and training, to the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri (Eckholm 2011). Of course, this project focuses on the ways these historical trends are performed and made inhabitable in a uniquely Egyptian post-colonial context. I certainly do not mean to imply that, by using the term 'evangelical,' Evangelicals Egyptians participate in, or sympathize with the so-called 'culture wars' of the U.S.A. At the same time, judging by the criteria used in other similar studies, the Egyptian Evangelical Presbyterian church can be appropriately and productively placed within the phenomenon of evangelicalism in the global south. I hope that 'evangelical' will be understood in terms of this Egyptian history and with reference to the larger literature on global evangelicalism for the purposes of this study.⁹

EVANGELICALS AND POLITICS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Evangelicalism has seen phenomenal growth in the global south in the 20th century. In his preface to Terrence Ranger's edited volume *Evangelical Christianity and*

⁹ I have chosen to cite examples of scholars studying evangelical groups in the global south who utilize Bebbington's criteria: (Laugrand and Oosten 2007; Freston 2004; Slavkova 2007; Ranger 2008). Bebbington's quadrilateral of priorities is also used in the American and European context (see Hankins 2009).

Democracy in Africa, Timothy Shah notes that “...the Protestant proportion of the population in Latin America was six times greater at the end of the twentieth century, in Asia ten times greater, and in Africa thirteen times greater” than at the beginning of the century (2008:x). A series of publications spearheaded by the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (IFEMT) have become the leading voice in this conversation, as, in the 1990s, this group of evangelicals began documenting the political projects of evangelical groups on Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹⁰

As scholars have rushed to study this increasingly large and vocal demographic, there has arisen a sense of ambiguity about the interplay between evangelical praxis and identification on the one hand and political activism on the other hand. This ambiguity is, perhaps, unavoidable given the dizzying array of communities around the world who identify with some form of evangelical religious community. Nonetheless, this ambiguity has been noted and debated in the literature surrounding evangelicalism in Africa (Ranger 2008), the globalization of Pentecostal/charismatic evangelicalism (Robbins 2004), and in comparative studies of evangelicals in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Freston 2001). This literature implicitly, and often explicitly, asks whether evangelicalism tends towards supporting democratic or authoritarian government. Often times, the question of the political projects of evangelicals has been implicated in the even larger literature surrounding the new “Protestant ethic” of evangelicalism, and the way that it supports capitalist accumulation and corporatist political agendas (see J. L.

¹⁰ The three edited works are: Ranger (2008) on Africa; Freston (2008) on Latin America; Lumsdaine (2009) on Asia.

Comaroff and J. Comaroff [2000] for the most influential ethnographic study of this kind).

On top of the aforementioned ambiguity that arises from the empirical and linguistic reach of this comparative project, there is also a conceptual roadblock: the difficulty of measuring “democratizing tendencies.” For instance, Wendy Brown (in Agamben et al. 2011) argues in “We’re all Democrats Now...” that democracy has become an “empty signifier”: it is nearly unanimously desired but in practice increasingly divorced from the actual rule of the *demos* (2011:44). For Brown, as for other contributors to the compilation *Democracy in What State*, the integrity of democracy is jeopardized by the increasing hegemony of global financial capital. This Marxian critique exemplifies the need for greater reflexiveness when asking questions of democracy on the global scale, especially as when they are asked normatively. The literature on the democratizing tendencies of evangelical praxis, while ambitiously comparative and meticulously researched, often takes “democracy” for granted, as the always already desired political end.

Inasmuch as the IFEMT collections seek a detailed mapping of political engagement by evangelicals in the global south my project makes an important contribution. In the large body of literature on evangelicals in the global south, I am not aware of any scholarly works on evangelicals in the Middle East and North Africa region. In particular, my research seeks to contribute to the conversation about what kinds of economic, political, and ethnic pressures lead evangelicals toward different political agendas in distinct geographies of the global south. However, my research is also interested in negotiated political subjectivity and the relationship between discourse and

power. Accordingly, although the leaders of KDEC overwhelmingly support a particular inflection of liberal secular democracy and speak often and strongly about human rights, political representation, and religious freedom, I am not interested in how well or poorly Evangelical Egyptians support “true” democracy in Egypt. As Julia Paley points out in her survey of the anthropology of democracy, even if democracy is a kind of “floating signifier” its localized meaning is always tangibly related to particular institutions and personalities (2002:477). An ethnographic approach is able to access these localized textures of democracy and secularism, in a way that normative political science accounts cannot. It is this localized texture to struggles over national belonging, the ideal citizen, and public religion that this study seeks to understand, without using as the normative analytic reference an ideal liberal democratic state.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

AUTHENTICITY AND SPURIOUSNESS

Egypt is the home to one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, the Coptic Orthodox Church, which claims roots in the missionary journey of the apostle Mark in the first century A.D. The Coptic Church takes great pride in this ancestral claim to the land of the Nile, and is quick to defend its historical independence from both Muslim Arab invaders of 639-641 and the various forms of Christianity in the Anglo-American world. The Evangelical Presbyterian community is, of course, the product of a very different missionary endeavor: the mid-western American mission workers of the UPCNA in the mid-19th century. Tensions simmered between Orthodox and Evangelicals in the 20th century, tensions framed in terms of authenticity, good

citizenship, and spurious foreign interference.¹¹ These debates have powerful purchase in conversations about Christianity and national belonging in Egypt and will necessarily influence the kinds of political subjectivities that are possible in KDEC. But, as anthropologists insist, authenticity and spuriousness are never as stable as they seem; cultural spheres are porous, heterogeneous, and always already in creative *and* reductive contact with other cultural spheres (Marcus and Fischer 1999). All forms of Christianity in Egypt are the legacy of foreign missions, whether first or nineteenth century, and all of them are embedded in the Egyptian cultural, political, and economic landscape. I am not interested in settling the question of what marks true authenticity, either in terms of ethnicity, citizenship, or religion. Rather, I am interested in understanding how congregants of KDEC narrate and negotiate their social history in relation to these debates. How are actors framing their claims for authenticity, and how do they articulate their history with regard to their present political involvement?

The adaptation of Anglo-American Evangelicalism to non-European contexts has resulted in a growing body of ethnographic literature that asks precisely these questions. Magdalena Slavkova's (2007) work on Evangelical Gypsies in Bulgaria showcases this same suspicion and vying for legitimacy of "New Churches" (Protestant Evangelical churches) in a land where the Orthodox, Muslim and Catholic communities are historically established and culturally embedded. Like Laugrand and Oosten's work on

¹¹ The history of the Anglo-American mission work in Egypt testifies more to often hostile, and always antagonistic, congregant swapping between Anglican, Evangelical, Coptic, and Catholic churches than any real proselytizing success with conversions out of Islam to any Christian denomination (Sharkey 2005:19). From conversations with Evangelical pastors in 2005, Sharkey concludes that mistrust of Anglican and Catholic churches had given way to solid networking and coalition by the 21st century; nevertheless, a tense and cold relationship with the Orthodox Coptic continued unabated (Sharkey 2008:227).

Pentecostal and Evangelical movements amongst the Inuit of the Canadian Eastern Arctic, such studies seek to answer the question, “How do [...] Evangelical movements manage to preserve that which they break from?” (2007:23). Because of the worldwide explosion of evangelical forms of Christian praxis and belief, communities like those of KDEC have great potential for examining the boundaries of an authentic subject who can speak as a *real* ‘Egyptian,’ as a real ‘Copt.’ Who can claim legitimate membership in the national community of Egypt and what ramifications does that national belonging have for accessing the rights of the citizen as the subject of the state? These questions of authenticity, adaptation, and negotiated subjectivities highlight the kinds of questions that this study seeks to clarify. Therefore, they form important counter-points to sharpen the unique angle that Evangelical Egyptians take to carve out a space in public discourses over national belonging, good citizenship, and public religion.

HABITUS AND SUBJECTIVITY

The sentiment that the events of January 2011 signify an unprecedented rupture in Egyptian history has wide currency inside and outside KDEC. My interlocutors narrate the Tahrir protests, the deposing of Hosni Mubarak and his subsequent trial, and the sustained waves of strikes around the country, as sometimes exciting, sometimes frightening, but always, it seems, new. Those I spoke with told a similar story of awakening from a political apathy and despair to a renewed sense of civic duty in the aftermath of January 25. On the other hand, there is a great sense of pride at KDEC for the church’s deep and long-standing commitment to the land and people of Egypt – Christian and Muslim alike. This dissonance of intention and action can be productively put into conversation with Bourdieu’s *habitus* as a “matrix of perceptions, appreciations,

and actions” (1977:72) out of which actors play out a series of “regulated improvisations” (1977:82). This community of faith is formed by a particular habitus, a commitment to particular bodily practices of worship and daily comportment, understandings about distributions of power, materiality and transcendence. But as has been repeatedly offered to me in conversation, many of the members and leaders of the church feel a lack of clarity in how their vision of the “faithful” life interfaces with the new situation in which they find themselves. Because of the suddenness and uncertainty of the January 25 uprising –the unexpected success in deposing Mubarak and the commencing volatile political scene –the practices of any actors are improvisations, albeit improvisations on flexible but regulated themes. Framing my research in terms of habitus will help elucidate questions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, as well as illustrate specific ways that these improvisations are performed in increasingly unpredictable scenarios. By what means do the leaders of KDEC extend, or improvise on, the already existent *dispositions* of the Evangelical community into unexplored areas of civic engagement? How do these dispositions change? How do political pressures from the military, the Muslim Brotherhood, and a multitude of political parties shape a particular kind of religious disposition?

While I find Bourdieu’s account of habitus to be a useful conceptual tool for exploring the political intervention of KDEC youth, in her work *The Politics of Piety* (2005) Saba Mahmood, raises some limits to Bourdieu’s habitus in regard to her ethnographic project amongst women in Egypt’s Mosque Movements that helpfully re-adjust the frame of my study as well. Mahmood draws on an older history of the term rooted in Aristotle. This older habitus was primarily an ethical disposition, but it had the

same sense of resiliency rooted in iterability that makes Bourdieu's habitus so compelling for social scientific research. The most salient difference, and the one most relevant for my project, is that the older Aristotelian habitus is a conscious and conscientious repetition of virtuous behavior, thereby supplementing Bourdieu's "lack of attention to the pedagogical process by which a *habitus* is formed" (2005:139). KDEC has a well-developed and far-reaching mentoring program for all age groups of the church, and it is in these small groups and conversations that the habitus (both in the Aristotelian ethical sense, as well as Bourdieu's sociological sense) is cultivated and honed. Moreover, it is in this pedagogical context that the youth of KDEC (in fact, all the members) are trained into a particular kind of religious and political subject. It should be noted here, however, that the *political* implications of these pedagogical moments are not simply manifested in speech directed to the state, legislation, and civic rights. As Mahmood convincingly shows, however, such pedagogical moments are also politically efficacious in creating subjectivities that "make a particular imaginary of politics possible" (2005:152). My project diverges from Mahmood's to the extent that unlike participation in the Mosque Movement, or in other kinds of Islamist politics, the political intervention of members of KDEC is more likely to champion the secularism of late liberal Western democracies. Such a contrast might be due to the higher socio-economic status of KDEC members, to their strong theological and social connections with U.S.-based evangelical ministries, or to their minoritarian religious status in Egypt. What kinds of improvisations on the melody of late liberal Western democracy are being made possible by the activism and discourse of KDEC? And, how, to push the metaphor a bit further, are the leaders of KDEC teaching these political actors to improvise? On what regulated themes?

METHODOLOGY

The site for this project is Kasr el Dobara Evangelical Church. The church is large, at about seven thousand regular attendees, and quite diverse. As a result, I employed two focal groups for understanding the negotiations of religion and politics, and the interactions of discourse and power: a group of politically engaged male church leaders and a group of youth actors with varying degrees of political involvement. I conducted individual person-centered interviews with four politically engaged male church leaders, who were either connected with the Political Activism Committee or to the large group meetings geared toward the church youth. I conducted interviews and focus groups with thirteen youth from the church. These youth were all in their mid-twenties, regular attendees at the church, and most were referred to me by the male church leaders. Half of these youth came from relatively high socio-economic positions and were college-educated; the other half were primarily from working class backgrounds in Upper Egypt, and had moved to Cairo for job opportunities.

This project involved three layers of ethnographic description: person-centered interviews, focus groups, and participant observation in large-group meetings (with attention to the language and framing of the public sermons of these meetings). Inasmuch as this project seeks to elucidate the negotiations of religious commitment and political participation, I privileged time and resources to person-centered interviewing, which includes accounts of personal history and religious commitments, as well as political views and activism.

These person-centered interviews were complemented with the second layer of engagement: a small focus group of four of the above-mentioned youth for the purpose of indexing, i.e. finding out the *commonsense categories* that these youth shared in common for what it means to be religious and political in the terms set out by Agar and MacDonald (1995:83). I chose participants for the focus group based on the recommendations from male leaders in the church; they recommended youth whom they perceived as committed to the church and “called” to politics, although many of the interlocutors that I ended up spending a great deal of time with expressed ambivalence toward this particular calling.¹² I facilitated this focus group with explicit questions of the intersection of faith and politics and, by inviting a variety of voices to the conversation, tried to allow for the unique opportunity of *seeing* the terms in which religion and revolution are negotiated and argued.

The third layer of engagement was participant observation in small-group and large-group meetings, in order to better understand how KDEC’s leadership attempted to shape the view of the appropriate religious citizen, from the pulpit. These authoritative sermons and public prayers by church leaders from the stage is what I refer to in this research as *institutionalized discourse*. As I indicate in this work, these discourses are often fragmentary and contradictory but, especially as part of an evangelical institution with its emphasis on preaching, these speech events carry a certain normative weight that others do not. This participant observation was supplemented by person-centered

¹² In this community, to be ‘called’ to a particular vocation or hobby usually indicates a mixture of an individual’s interest, aptitude, knowledge, and sense of God’s leading which is often validated by the affirmation of a small-group leader or pastor.

interviewing with second-tier church leaders. The participant observation and interviewing was employed to try to provide an accurate, though not belabored, depiction of the authoritative voices and discourses that form the background for these political interventions –correcting the Bourdieu’s “lack of attention to the pedagogical process by which a habitus is formed” (Mahmood 2005:139). I then put this participant observation and close attention to the framing discourse(s) of church sermons into critical conversation with the material from interviews with some of the second-tier church authorities, in which more *explicit* models were proffered.

Because this project seeks to understand negotiations that are evolving and being shaped in the here and now, the methodology of ethnography –especially with the kind of layering that I will be employing –can give us a picture of this moment amongst the Evangelicals of KDEC that is neither reductive (to individualized identity) or inappropriately totalizing (by paying exclusive attention to the authoritative discourses).

ETHNOGRAPHIC LOCATION

As Susan Harding (1991) noted early on in her research among American fundamentalists, and many others have noted since, there is a certain suspicion of Christian sympathies that has often marked researchers interested in conservative and particularly U.S. American forms of Christian practice – Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, and fundamentalism. In this sense I am implicated. The child of evangelical overseas missionaries, I spent my early childhood and adolescence on “the mission field” and was educated until high school at a small private evangelical school for the children of missionaries. U.S. American evangelicalism is, however, not just the tradition of my birth

and upbringing but continues to be a significant part of how I see myself as a subject-in-the-world. My religious commitments echo what Christian anthropologist Brian Howell has written about his own:

To be a Christian is to orient one's physical and moral being towards particular commitments – a hermeneutic of (holy) text, a relevance of spirituality, an agency of divinity - and communities – a local church, the global and transcendent Body of Christ. (2007:384)

I preface this study with my own positionality not out of an impulse for “navel-gazing” or “hypersensitivity” (Jacobs-Huey 2006:144), but because my orientation toward evangelical Christian modes of religious practice, belief, and belonging is a constitutive part of this project. It is what sparked my original curiosity in Evangelical Egyptians and their complicated negotiations in revolutionary Egypt. This orientation also, however, was publicly indexed by my embodied participation in corporate singing, reading, and prayer at church services and among my interlocutors. I entered the community as a fellow “believer” and donned the persona of “researcher” only later. This means that, among other things, the questions I posed and the answers I was given were products of an inter-subjective experience between subjects with broadly similar religious communities and commitments. This positionality has, therefore, complicated my own sense of allegiance and accountability as a peripherally “native” anthropologist.

Many “native” anthropologists, however, have challenged the usefulness of the rigid dichotomy between outsider/insider, researcher/informant, in favor of a more nuanced view of the intersubjectivity that constitutes ethnographic research. In a prominent example, Kirin Narayan highlights the way that this terminology elides the many and painful ways that “native” scholars are enmeshed in “shifting identifications

amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations” (Narayan 1993:671). As an anthropologist, an American, and a non-charismatic, among other things, I am a striking “outsider” to the charismatic Evangelical Egyptian engineers, students, businessmen, and professional ministers to which this work is indebted.

Throughout this thesis, therefore, I do not thematize my Christian commitments, as an “ethnographic standpoint” (per Howell 2007) or a bid for a “native” anthropology, in part that is due to the variety of gender, class, national, and political identities that I do not share with the majority of my interlocutors. This choice is also a product of the compelling case that many “native” anthropologists have made for the way that native/insider framings “are insufficient descriptors for the manner in which scholars negotiate multiple identities in the field” (Jacobs-Huey 2006:135) and the reality that, as James Clifford once noted, “one can, in fact, be a Christian *and* be something else” (as quoted in Howell 2007:379).

CONTRIBUTION

Kasr el Dohara Evangelical Church sits at a very productive crossroad for anthropological inquiry, especially in its participation in the January 25 uprising in Cairo. Its unique position in world Christianity, the Middle East, and Protestantism makes it an important community that like, a prism, can refract questions at the heart of anthropological concern: questions of authenticity, political subjectivity, national belonging, and the intersection of religion and politics. At times these refractions challenge dominant discourses (especially concerning secularism and Islamist politics) and at other times they lend ethnographic shape to academic and popular discourses

(concerning the making of the political subject). This project will be a testament to the work of a small but committed religious community as it negotiates old questions in a new and unpredictable revolutionary moment. My hope is that this project will contribute to the ongoing conversation about what it means to be speaking, believing, and acting humans in a changing world.

CHAPTER 2: RAHĪB: THE POLITICS OF PRAYER

A PROPHETIC WORD

A large banner hangs over the main stage in the spacious sanctuary of Kasr el Dohara Church throughout 2011. In the background, the bright blue river Nile meanders through the dull brown and vivid, though sparse, green of the land of Egypt. Across what would be the western desert, large red letters say in Arabic “*Ina ala-dhī ana fa’luhu ma’ak rahībun*” (For it is an *awesome thing* that I will do with you” Exodus 34:10 NRSV). The last word, *rahīb*, is sprawled in font five times larger than the preceding verse across the bottom of the banner. Congregants told me it meant something like “awesome” or “wonderful,” but that it carried overtones of terribleness or danger that these English translations failed to capture. This qualification was never absent from the definition. These ancient scriptural words became during the year 2011 an imminent promise – a prophetic utterance to the church of Egypt.

This prophetic impulse is widely recognized as one of KDEC’s most important characteristics in Egyptian Evangelical circles. I spoke to one young woman, Fawzia,¹³ who had moved to Cairo from Upper Egypt six years ago, seeking employment and the opportunity to study. Fawzia told her story as one of oppressive religious discrimination

¹³ All the names in this thesis have been changed in order to protect these interlocutors. Pastor Sameh Maurice is the exception, due to the public nature of his sermons and the fact that most of what I record here was broadcast internationally.

that turned the nationalist fervor and affections she had as a young child into bitter anger at what she called her “second-class citizenship.” She knew of KDEC from her years in Asyut, a main city center in Upper Egypt, when she would listen to its array of T.V. and radio programs aimed at biblical teaching, Christian living, and apologetics. Even before she arrived in Cairo she knew that she wanted to go to the church where the famous Sameh Maurice preached. Nevertheless, she was shocked by the emphasis that KDEC church leaders placed on intercessory prayer for Egypt.

I always thought it’s very strange that they...always [initiate] a prayer for Egypt. And, I always...at some point I thought they are idiots...They kill your people! They kill the Christians! They hate you! OK, when I try to forgive, when I try to love...when I try to do all those things it made me feel good, it made me feel stronger. But, at some point I thought, they are idiots. Nothing is going to change. Nothing is going to be different. Why are you making the effort?

She had been attracted to prayer meetings and prayer leaders at KDEC that I discuss later in this chapter, and she said that the prayer she engaged in at KDEC profoundly changed the way that she thought about being a Christian in Egypt.¹⁴ She spoke of her changing

¹⁴ In speaking about “Christians in Egypt” it is important to note that the Evangelical Church in Egypt has historically had a difficult relationship with the Coptic Orthodox Church. As I noted in chapter 1, the Evangelical Church historically was comprised of families from the Coptic Orthodox Church – a reality that engenders no lack of frustration from the Coptic Orthodox authorities. Most Evangelicals that I spoke with at KDEC were not explicitly hostile to the Coptic Orthodox Church, saying that they loved their Orthodox peers and a number of high profile Coptic churches and monks. Many of them even called themselves Coptic Christians (In fact, until 2004, the Evangelical church was officially named the *Coptic Evangelical Church of Egypt*). Even given these nominal overlaps, the cultural world of Evangelical Egyptians and that of Coptic Orthodox Egyptians is widely divergent, and nowhere is this more evident than in the highly affluent *and* religiously devout members and attendees of KDEC. Very often in sermons, and more often in personal conversations and interviews, these Evangelicals defined their small group meetings, expository Bible teaching, church leadership style, and theological assumptions about salvation, grace, and discipleship in direct opposition to the Coptic Orthodox church. But, in moments like the Maspero massacre and the Alexandria Church bombing (the casualties of which were exclusively Coptic Orthodox) these important fissures in Egyptian Christianity become immaterial and those killed become victims of that familiar force of religious

attitude toward Egypt, over the course of the years she attended KDEC, as a kind of spiritual healing: from bitterness toward a majority Muslim country in which she felt herself to be a second-class citizen to an investment in a country in which she had a stake, a country worth her involvement, her affection, and, most importantly, her prayer. I was told that this “prayer movement” for Egypt at KDEC had been eight years in the making.

The kind of religious discrimination that Fawzia described and the general feeling of Christians that they were “second-class citizens” seemed to be the main concern of the leaders of KDEC and the main target of their prayers for renewal for the country. While my formal fieldwork at KDEC began months after the January 25 protests that deposed Hosni Mubarak, almost all of the congregants that I spoke with articulated the anxieties of the church prior to 2011, by calling to mind this perceived lack of religious statement and equal status. Sometimes youth leaders and church elders would reference the corruption of everyday Egyptian life – the endless *baksheesh*¹⁵, long lines, and incompetent government officials. Lastly, some of my interlocutors (especially the older leaders who were involved in political parties and tasked with raising awareness in the church) would speak about the growing poverty that they saw as part of high-level corruption in the Mubarak regime. All in all, however, the most obvious story about the church’s stake in “the revolution” was its sympathy with the principles of democracy, the

discrimination. I discuss the changing fissures, alliances, and homogeneity of the category of “Christians in Egypt” in chapter 5.

¹⁵ This word can connote either the expected tipping in Egypt for employees in the service sector or bribery of officials to expedite long, arduous bureaucratic processes.

rule of law, and religious tolerance – principles that many hoped would lessen the difficulties of life in Egypt, and especially of the lives of Christians in Egypt.

I was told again and again the story of how KDEC fasted for 40 days at the end of 2010 awaiting a “word from God.” This process included individual fasting and prayer regimes as well as long meetings of corporate worship through singing and prayer. The leadership received the above verse from the Old Testament book of Exodus chapter 34 as the awaited “word” - a promise that God would produce a *rahīb* in the land of Egypt. Indeed, so the story goes, the first sign of God’s fulfillment of his promise occurred just 20 minutes after the end of the New Year’s Celebration at KDEC –the horrific Alexandria church bombing that left 21 dead and 70 injured. This tragic event became an iconic symbol of the promised *rahīb*, an unexpected and terrible answer to prayers for renewal. In the case of this event, one indication that this event was a manifestation of the divine *rahīb* was the outpouring of inter-religious solidarity, especially around the following Christmas celebrations.¹⁶ Indeed, many of the events that KDEC leaders recounted as moments of this divine *rahīb* were bloody events: the Alexandria church bombing of January 1, the mass protests of January 25 through February 11 that ousted Mubarak at the price of some 800 protestors’ lives, the Maspero massacre of October 9, the violence of the late November protests against the Supreme Council of Armed Forces.¹⁷ Even those (the majority of church members, I was told repeatedly) who were initially ambivalent and afraid of the uprisings of January 25 and who did not step a foot

¹⁶ The Coptic Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on January 7.

in Tahrir Square during the protests, saw their *actions* and *words* as having been *the* ultimate driving force in the divine intervention that brought about Egypt's revolution and the subsequent removal of Hosni Mubarak from power.

In this chapter I ask the question: When prayers and fasts become the most effective forms of action for and against the state, what becomes of the political? I approach this question in two ways. The first approach uses the early work of Talal Asad to think through the intertwining of politics and religion at KDEC at this juncture. As Ruth Marshall succinctly states in a different context, though the language of KDEC might appear “eminently political, we find it difficult to reconcile these invisible and ephemeral forces with more classical forms of representation and action” (Marshall 2009:2). I use Talal Asad's critique of Geertzian approaches to the anthropology of religion as well as the work of Saba Mahmood (2005) and Ruth Marshall (2009) to re-situate the terms of the debate concerning religion and politics in order to bring into focus some of strategies and tensions at work in KDEC's navigation of this moment in Egypt. The second approach looks concretely at the kinds of disciplinary regimes, primarily technologies of self, that are practiced at KDEC in order to understand how these actors are shaped into citizens who engage the Egyptian state and its apparatuses in the context of protest. I frame this investigation in terms of Foucauldian hermeneutics of the self and draw on Asad's own Foucauldian approach to regimes of power in religious communities.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

A popular discourse about the Egyptian uprising of January 2011 describes the large-scale, popular protests that toppled the 30-year head of an autocratic state as an historic moment that no one could have anticipated. In my conversations with congregants and leaders at KDEC, however, another story was being told about the uprising of January 25. Over and over again, worshippers at KDEC told me with great feeling that while the events of January may seem to have come out of nowhere, they were in fact a direct, divine intervention in response to the faithful prayer movement that had been growing in KDEC over the last eight years. As Fawzia told me:

They have been waiting since a very long time. They have been praying about the country all the time, they were praying about change to be happen. So it wasn't...it was for them like a victorious move, or change. An answer to their prayer, this is how the church thinks about it.

Even though she has been a regular attendee of KDEC she refers to the “they” of KDEC leadership who were maintaining this prayer movement “for Egypt” for many years before she arrived. Just like Fawzia, many church members understood the popular protests and the toppling of the Mubarak regime as an answer to prayer, a sign of God’s favor on KDEC and his love of Egypt, and as a movement of God on behalf of the Christian minority of Egypt. The congregants I spoke with also acknowledged social, economic, and political impetuses for the hundreds of thousands of protestors who flocked to the Square during the 18 days in January and February, but these material factors were seen as proximate causes that were mobilized by divine power because of the faithful years of prayer at KDEC. Yousef, a tall, shy twenty-something at KDEC, who loved this prayer movement, echoed the narrative that many interlocutors told.

Yousef: In the beginning [of the January 25th protests] I didn't understand what was going on. I was very hesitant about whether it was right or wrong, whether I should go or stay.

Anna: What were the reasons that you thought it would be *right* to go?

Yousef: There were two sides that were confusing me. As an Egyptian I wanted to go to help my country change. As a Christian from Kasr el Dohara I thought that I have another way of helping the country to change. We can do this in a different way.

Anna: Practically as a Christian you could change the country in a different way than having to go to the Square?

Yousef: Yes.

Anna: How is that?

Yousef: I don't need to go to Tahrir Square to change my country because I am already in the spiritual square. We have been praying for the country for years and years for the country to change. In fact I believe that the revolution began in the church but the obvious role was in [Tahrir Square]. I think we are the power behind it but I don't think it is my role to fight. My role is to lift hands up.

While many individual youth and leaders at KDEC were involved in the 25th of January protests I am not aware of any of them taking roles of leadership in the activist groups that made important organizational decisions before and throughout the 18 days in Tahrir. As I noted earlier, the congregants of KDEC warmed up only slowly to the idea of participating in a sometimes violent, always uncertain, *political* protest. I use “political” here to draw out the distinction that many of my interlocutors saw in the process of going to the Square and implicating themselves in violence, direction and open rebellion against the state, and political ideologies that they did not support (especially those of Islamists). These processes are widely seen at KDEC, along with creating and

joining political parties, electoral campaigns, and government bureaucracy as – in the words of one of my youth interlocutors – “a dirty game.”¹⁸

In light of this record of hesitancy, the language of ownership and political efficacy does not resonat with common understandings of ‘political.’ In fact, none of my interlocutors at KDEC see these activities of prayer and fasting as ‘political’ per se. During my first months of fieldwork, as I struggled to find youth and leaders who were ‘interested in politics,’ I found few people who volunteered themselves as political activists. As I began to develop relationships and speak further with many of these early contacts, however, I was surprised by how consistently these same interlocutors thought of their practices of piety as direct and ultimate causes of these ‘political’ protests in the Square and around Egypt. While these congregants articulated a very clear and unproblematized distinction between “prayer” and “politics” they also, in other significant ways, blurred the lines between political and religious. They saw the political as essentially off-limits to religious intervention. At the same time, though, they considered their practices of prayer, personal piety, and corporate worship as the most efficacious forms of *intervention* in the political, that is in the realm of human life that consists of government institutions, legislative power, and positions of state authority.

¹⁸ This timidity in joining the protests undoubtedly has some important socio-political causes as well. The ex-president Hosni Mubarak had been constructed in the Egyptian public sphere and especially among Egyptian Christians, as a protector of the Coptic Christians against a growing and hostile Islamist presence. Especially among older Evangelicals, the biblical injunctions to submit to authorities (most notably Romans 13:1-7) were also seen as morally restricting Christians from participating in any rebellion against the existing state regime.

It was not by participating in protests, speaking out publicly against the Mubarak regime, or joining political parties that they most powerfully effected change in Egyptian political structures but, rather, by humbling themselves (affectivity), praying (piety), and fasting (self discipline). As Marshall notes, in this very important sense, “through prayer and witness, [believers] do things with words” (2009:4). What, then, can be said about this acting-on-the-world that is performed through prayer? How is it discursively reconciled on the part of KDEC congregants with more classical forms of political participation and civic engagement? And what kind of subject making is required for this kind engagement with the *political*?

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION: FROM GEERTZ TO ASAD

In the face of this incongruity between ‘political’ words and ‘religious’ practice, a well traveled anthropological path might be to interpret the practices of prayer, fasting, and corporate worship as means of translation for the political, such that the religious commitments of KDEC become the means by which these congregants come to interpret the ‘real’ political, economic, and social upheavals of 2011. Such functionalist understandings of religious language, communities, and logics have circulated widely in the anthropology of religion. In this formal sense, the ‘religious’ (encompassing practices of prayer, fasting, and corporate worship) functions as a meaning-making system by which people make sense of the uncertainty of popular rebellions, the violence of state power, worsening economic conditions, or any of a host of material conditions.

Talal Asad has been one of the most out-spoken and convincing critics of such functionalist understandings of religion. In *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), Asad calls his readers’ attention to the difference between the post-Enlightenment, Victorian-era

understanding of religion as an ancient hold-over that would be quickly replaced by modern politics and economies, and the more modern academic conception of religion as “a distinctive space of human practice and belief that cannot be reduced to any other” (1993:27). The latter is most popularly associated with the work of Clifford Geertz¹⁹ but certainly does not end or begin with his work. Asad presents two main critiques of what, at the time of his early writing, was an increasingly hegemonic notion of religion as “a system of symbols.” First, he argues that because this interiorized version of religion is embedded in a Western Christian theological and intellectual history, approaches such as Geertz’s are unable to account for religious faiths and practices that do not share that genealogy. Second, Asad argues that separating inward *dispositions* from outward *disciplines* is an untenable framework and can be neither challenged nor verified through anthropological fieldwork. More importantly, by emphasizing *internal dispositions* and cognitive assent in this manner, anthropologists become unable to take seriously the way that overtly material and institutional power relations constitute the possibilities for living a proper life in religious communities. Asad insists that this theoretical apparatus for thinking academically about religion creates a distorted understanding of non-Christian religious practices and an anemic understanding of Christian ones (1993:33).

In this engagement I similarly reject this understanding that internal dispositions constitute the *true* religious experience. I begin by investigating what it means at KDEC that the prayers and practices of the faithful might not only transform the inner thoughts and outward behaviors of practitioners (a very important theme for teaching and

¹⁹ Geertz has a wide corpus of work on religion in anthropology, of which “Religion as Cultural System” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* is a representative argument (Geertz 1973).

instruction at KDEC) but that it also could effect change in the power of structures of the state. This is not a theological argument. I am not trying to make an empirical case for whether or not prayers of Evangelicals at KDEC *did* in fact bring down the head of an autocratic state. Even my interlocutors at KDEC would see such a project as misguided. Nevertheless, I do intend, as Ruth Marshall says, “to take faith seriously” by “attempt[ing] to restore intelligibility to religion in its irreducibility, to make sense of the inherent rationality of its disciplines and practices, over and above its social, cultural, or political functions” (2009:3). Marshall’s challenge in this context is to understand how this vision of political power, exercised through prayer, is sustained by institutionalized discourse, corporate worship, and service projects, and how this vision of effecting change on the political landscape is sustained by certain kinds of political actors.

Aside from simply taking religious communities’ words and intentions seriously and on their own terms, how can we further understand the work that these imaginaries of power and action do among the communities that embrace them? In this regard I find important theoretical support in Saba Mahmood’s work among the Women’s Piety Movement in Egypt of the late 1990s. Mahmood takes to task a secular-liberal imaginary for its hegemonic normativity in social scientific studies of, in particular, Islamist communities and ideologies. She asserts that this imaginary perseverates over identity politics and actions directed explicitly to either the judiciary or the state. In contrast, she argues that the political salience of the Piety movement in Egypt is not in its overtly political character but, rather, in the way that these groups understand what “constitutes a proper way of living ethically in the world” (2005:192). And, more importantly for the purposes of my study, it is these very practices of bodily comportment, affectivity, and

pious living that create certain subjectivities and, therefore, “make a particular imaginary of politics possible” (2005:152).

I take for granted, therefore, that it is not just the overtly political actions that shape the kinds of *citizens* at KDEC, but also practices like prayer, fasting, and corporate worship. These affective practices create particular enemies, distributions of power, and sites of resistance. For example, one’s allegiances are oriented differently if one is in a supernatural war between good and evil than if “power” is negotiated and regulated exclusively between activist collectives, political parties, and state institutions. In spite of these non-liberal elements in their political imaginary, however, Evangelicals at KDEC are also committed to a secular-liberal political project in which, most importantly, “religion” should ideally be excluded from public discourse. This paradox at KDEC operates on the contention that “religious” practices constitute the most effective form of political intervention at the same time as “religion” is ideologically refused in the political sphere. In fact, this is one of the most important divergences of my work from that of Saba Mahmood. While the Piety Movement, and Islamist politics more broadly, are often characterized by antagonism toward a secular-liberal imaginary, the political actors of KDEC are both staunchly and consistently secular in political outlook. While the nonliberal nature of the Piety Movement was what drove Mahmood to reconsider the way that ethical pedagogy and *habitus* might have import for political subjectivity, her argument can be extended to understanding the political imaginary of communities that adopt a vision of secular-liberal political discourse, however much these discourses might be inflected by particular non-liberal commitments. In fact, it is this very tension that creates the kind of dissonance that Marshall notes between words

that are overtly political but in a sense that is only marginally intelligible within a secular-liberal discourse. This uniquely inflected political imaginary is sustained at KDEC by the institutionalized discourse from the pulpit at large group services and prayer meetings. In the following section I give an example of how this political imaginary was evoked and developed at particularly traumatic juncture of 2011: the Maspero massacre of October.

POLITICAL IMAGINARIES: SCAF AND DEMONS

I arrived late to the Monday night prayer meeting, and slid onto the edge of the pew in the already packed translation section in the back left corner of the main meeting hall. Both of the two main screens that usually project the words of worship songs showed pictures of Egyptian flags, and an oversized Egyptian flag sat in the middle of the stage with a corner tucked into the back of the piano so that it was fully unfurled center-stage. It was a somber service in the wake of the Maspero massacre of October 9, 2011 that left over 20 Coptic protestors dead, many of them run over by military tanks. Social media sites exploded with pictures of mangled bodies at the nearby Qasr al-Aini hospital, fiancées wailing over the bodies of their never-to-be-husbands, and family members consoling one another in the wake of the most explicit violence toward Egyptian civilians thus far attributed to the Egyptian military.²⁰

²⁰ Most of the violence at protests up to this point, and certainly during the 18 days in Tahrir Square, had been perpetrated ostensibly by the Egyptian police under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior. The army had been the “protector of the revolution” and had been seen as the mediator between the Mubarak regime’s dysfunctional security forces and the people. Indeed, the official military line on Maspero has been that the perpetrators themselves were Copts or unnamed others who stole military uniforms and vehicles (El-Hennawy 2011).

The massacre shook the country on all sides. Some were disgusted by the unmitigated violence of the army, some feared an uptick in sectarian violence, and some were intent on galvanizing those sectarian fissures. Earlier that weekend Sameh Maurice had spoken at the youth meeting; candles were distributed and the lights turned down in the sanctuary while thousands prayed by candle light for peace. Pastor Maurice preached on love for one's enemy:

The true miracle of the church is love in our hearts. There is nothing harder than love. Hatred is extremely easy, because it is Satanic work. It is Satan's work and he gives it freely. Love God gives us, and it's a heavenly thing...God gave us the love in order to love God, ourselves, and each other.

Emphatically he reiterated, "Our war is against spirits of hatred, murder...not against human beings."

Pastor Sameh painted a world not of political actors jockeying for power and legitimacy or military commanders seeking to retain a semblance of control or religious tensions and mistrust that simmered under the surface of Egyptian society. The war that KDEC was engaged in was defined by love and hatred –the first, a costly and difficult gift of God, the second a cheap and easy trap of the devil. These were the terms of the power struggle, and also the weapons with which to respond to the massacre.

The worship leader at the Monday night service repeated this same theme. As I entered the hall, he was pacing rapidly back and forth on the stage, shouting and wiping sweat from his brow as he prayed with face lifted up to the ceiling,

As we read in Timothy we pray for those in authority. Let us bless them; we don't want to be like other people who rebel...Let's lift them up in prayers instead of saying negative words. Ask that the Lord will remove all darkness from their minds. Protect them from every rebellion and attacks. Establish their hearts in

your ways and counsels. We pray for the field marshal and his generals. We bless them with divine wisdom. Protect them, speak through them. Against all the attempts of the enemy to convince them to do his will. Guide the leaders these days according to your heart, your good will. Let the pressures make them deep rooted in your truth.

In light of the story that I have told of this prophetic and powerful prayer movement at KDEC, this worship leader's comments strike one as discordant. Certainly their prayers, especially imbued with this divine power, must be tools of rebellion against established authority. When does renewal become rebellion? As the story goes, these prayers were the primary tools by which Mubarak was ousted. Nevertheless, essential to this story is the fact that these prayers were tools for mobilizing divine power. Ultimately the *rahīb* that was desired and affected by these prayers had as its ultimate cause the hand of God. I think that this is an important distinction to make in trying to understand the salience of *this* form of political intervention in contrast to more traditional forms of political intervention. As the dismay and confusion that many felt at the tragedy of the January 1, 2011, Alexandria Church Bombing indicates, this form of intervention is inherently ambiguous. When one prays for *rahīb* it is never clear what form that divine intervention will take. The goals are unclear to those who seek it.²¹

²¹ This is not to say that more traditional forms of political or revolutionary intervention (like protests or electoral campaigning) are not also, in this moment in Egypt, subject to a great deal of ambiguity. That is certainly not the case. There is, though, a difference between protesting for the ouster of a president, campaigning for the election of a particular presidential candidate, or filling in a ballot in a parliamentary election and praying for divine *rahīb*, at least as it is practiced at KDEC. The former practices have a fairly clear objective and a fairly clear means of deciding whether it has or has not been achieved. But the divine *rahīb* at KDEC has both ambiguous ends and means. It is not subject simply to the contingencies of history and current events, as are electoral campaigns and protest movements, but is also dependent upon a divine intention that is largely un-knowable to those who pray it into existence.

The ambiguity inherent in praying for *rahīb* is closely tied to the form that these sermons take. As I suggested earlier, these prayers were directed toward corruption and religious discrimination in the hopes of replacing these “dark forces” with democracy, religious freedom and equality. But this excerpt, alongside many others, suggests that these forces are best battled through these practices of piety. Like Sameh’s sermon of a few days earlier, this church leader positions the power to be defeated not in the ranks of the SCAF but in spiritual forces (“darkness” and “the enemy”) external to the military generals but prepared to overwhelm them. Unlike the discourses that produced slogans like FUCK SCAF and *Kathiboon*²², the discourses coming out of KDEC took pains to distinguish between “the enemy” at work to destroy Egypt, and the human beings who were his tools.²³

DISCIPLINE

Mahmood, Asad, and Marshall argue forcefully that the political imaginary of these communities is constituted not only by an ethical vision or shared beliefs but also by a regime of discipline and power. In order to engage this question I turn once more to Michel Foucault, whose work undergirds both explicitly and implicitly the work of Mahmood, Asad, and Marshall. These practices of prayer, fasting, and humbling oneself as practiced at KDEC are forms of what Foucault called “techniques or technology of the

²² Meaning “liars,” *Kāthibūn* was a campaign launched in December in an outcry over the military violence against protestors outside of the Cabinet Building in downtown Cairo, and the concerted media effort used to invalidate protestors’ grievances against security forces for the brutal crackdown.

²³ It does no good to overstate this rhetoric, as there is much to be said about religious minorities needing to mask their disapproval of governing bodies. Nevertheless, in other contexts authors have noted how this kind of imaginary of ephemeral and invisible powers produces a similar effect of re-organizing models of oppression and liberation, differently from ways in which a typical secular liberal imagination might do so (see for instance Robbins 2004:134).

self.” These are “techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct” with the explicit aim of attaining some individual state of bliss, perfection, or power (1993:203). Foucault argued that these technologies of self cannot be conflated with technologies of domination, and that he accessed the modern subject by studying the transformation of these technologies of self through the Hellenic to the early Christian periods. Following Foucault’s methodological lead, I argue that the political subjects of KDEC are constituted not only by technologies of domination but also, and most importantly, by technologies of self.

It is this very emphasis on regimes of self-discipline that Asad picks up in his work on the anthropology of religion when he asks, “Can we know what [religious symbols] mean without regard to the social disciplines by which their correct reading is secured?” and it these regimes of self-discipline that make possible certain kinds of subjects (1993:53). By subject here and elsewhere I mean, as Webb Keane defines it, “historically and culturally specific and semiotically mediated, constructions of the nature of the human and its capacities” (Keane 2007:55). In 2011 at KDEC there was a concerted effort to produce from the pulpit and in church activities certain understandings of “the nature of the human and its capacities” vis-à-vis the political arena. These institutional discourses, like Pastor Sameh’s sermon on the SCAF and demons, shaped the sites of self-discipline at the church in salient ways, producing subjects that engaged in the political arena with a unique understanding of distributions of power, political efficacy, and the ideal citizen. During the course of my fieldwork I became convinced

that one of the most important sites of this discipline was the popular, but also polarizing, *Bait al-Salah*.

BAIT AL-SALAH (THE HOUSE OF PRAYER)

Every Wednesday evening a small portion of KDEC's youth meet in a small room overlooking the main plaza of the church building. They sit in simple black plastic folding chairs, with a row of five fans slowly whirring in the summer, facing the eastern wall where a small keyboard and a mountain of amps sit in front of a large whiteboard. Four round opaque windows line the upper wall, while pastel colored worship flags move lightly with the rhythm of the fans. This meeting is the *Bait al-Salah*, the "House of Prayer," which I have been told has people praying and singing worship songs twenty-four hours a day, every day. The Wednesday night "shift" seems to be the most popular of the week and attracts about two hundred congregants –mostly young adults but also some older married couples and church leaders. The small room is packed with these folding chairs; one's knees often rest against the back of the seats of the row ahead. Once in position it is difficult to maneuver out of one's seat, and most people seem to stay put for the whole service. The music continues for the whole two hours, sometimes with piano interludes for small group prayer. During these instrumental interludes the attendees break off into small groups of three or four and strangers and friends clasp hands and pray aloud together for the national economy, Egyptian churches, healing, or the government. The room buzzes with energy as hundreds of people petition for God's intervention on their behalf.

Unlike the other services that are held almost every evening of the week, this meeting is called a prayer "shift" and it is not structured around a sermon. There are

church leaders present who lead the corporate prayer times but, for the majority of the two hours, congregants sit or stand while they prayer individually and spontaneously. Even the music is structured in such a way that it blurs the lines between the practice of prayer and that of worship. One simple chorus of five to ten words can be repeated some thirty times in a row and these statements are usually constructed as personal prayers to God.

The meeting is modeled after, and draws its inspiration from, a high-profile evangelical ministry in Kansas City, Missouri. The International House of Prayer (IHOP), established in 1999, claims not to have stopped its prayer or music for over a decade. It has been called a charismatic evangelical ministry and has a great deal of popularity amongst charismatic non-denominational churches in the U.S. and abroad.²⁴ Interlocutors that I spoke with at KDEC considered IHOP to be a sister ministry, and many youth spoke very fondly of the organization. A number told me that they were saving up their money for a trip to Missouri to visit the sprawling campus. Certainly there are youth at the church who are disinterested in the particular form of spirituality, prayer, and worship

²⁴ There is a surprising difficulty in social scientific research in defining and labeling groups like fundamentalists, evangelicals, Pentecostals, and charismatics, which is influenced by the fact that these terms are used both as analytic categories by social scientists and as folk categories by the groups that those social scientists study (Robbins 2004:119). First, while these two categories – academic and self-referential – might overlap they do not always do so (see my discussion in the Introduction for how I have categorized the Presbyterian Church of Egypt [*al-Kanissa al-Injiliyya*] as evangelical). Second, the term Pentecostal refers to a movement that emerged from late-19th century Methodism and that focused on speaking in tongues, ecstatic forms of worship, dispensational premillennialism, and faith healing. Pentecostals soon established major denominations like the Assemblies of God and The Church of God in Christ (Robbins, 2004, p. 120). In the 1960s mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches began accepting members who had Pentecostal leanings. Members of non-Pentecostal denominations who exhibit Pentecostal religious practices are usually called charismatics or neo-charismatics in the scholarly literature (Robbins, 2004, p. 120).

that is practiced at *Bait al-Salah* and its charismatic tendencies, but it is striking that all the youth whom leaders encouraged me to contact about this project were also involved in the *Bait al-Salah*.

The “shifts” at *Bait al-Salah* were the central part of what Fawzia earlier called the prayer movement of KDEC for the renewal of Egypt. This means that, from the perspective of leaders and youth, the prayers offered there did not *simply* change the people who uttered them, but actually effected material changes in the world. This commitment was often times embodied in these meetings physically when leaders asked those present to standing facing a particular direction – toward the Ministry of Interior, or Tahrir Square – and stretch their hands toward the institution to be changed as they prayed aloud.

Indeed, during the November protests in the battle of Mohamed Mahmoud, the evening “shifts” still attracted a significant group of church youth; the small upper room was filled with singing and praying to the repetitive melodic ballads, at once announcing the ultimate authority and power of God and pleading with him to come and calm the violence in the Square. The juxtaposition could not have been more poignant between the gun and tear gas shots resounding through the Square mixed with chanting and yelling and the rising voices of the hundreds of Egyptian youth chanting and singing their own forms of political intervention. It was as if these youth were saying along with Yousef from earlier in the chapter, “we have another way of helping the country to change.”

Even given this predominant sense that the goal of this prayer movement was the battling of external spiritual and material forces, these meetings also cultivated certain dispositions among the youth who were part of them. Again echoing the language that Pastor Sameh used in the sermon on SCAF and demonic forces, the youth I spoke with who were involved in *Bait al-Salah* said that their prayers changed them into people who loved their country. In these conversations this love was always defined as an inward disposition of emotional attachment to “the imagined community” of the Egyptian nation. But it had outward manifestations as well as Fawzia explained once to me:

It [Christian political involvement] is different than a Muslim who does not know about this. They live and think they have to fight for their country and they think they are a martyr if they die for their country. We have a role. If we have to go out and say we don't like it, we would. But mostly we depend on our prayer. We depend on helping others and being the people that we want others to be. We, you know, try to not throw trash so we are a clean country. We try to behave and not hurt others so we have, you know, love in our country.

What is important about Fawzia's statement here is that the “love” she fosters toward her country is embodied in actions like not littering and being kind to others. Many other youth that I spoke struck a similar note in our conversations, and these activities were almost always inter-personal and service-oriented. In the course of my conversations and time at KDEC, it seems that this sense of civic duty and love of country has been cultivated most strongly and consistently at the *Bait al-Salah* “shifts” and by leaders attached to it in other larger meetings.

During the November protests in the battle of Mohamed Mahmoud, these young men would go into Mohamed Mahmoud and return to the church building after a couple of hours, their gas masks around their necks and their faces stained with saline solution, and pray and sing in the upper prayer room before returning to help in the clinic or head

out to the streets again. Most of the women that I met or spoke with who came to these prayer meetings during the protests of late November 2011 or early February 2012 went out to the ‘front lines’ only for a couple of minutes for a prayer walk or to see what was going on, but to my knowledge they spent their time mostly in the prayer room or in the main sanctuary. Regardless, though, *Bait al-Salah* was an important space for shaping the way that youth and leaders envisioned their contribution to the revolutionary struggle, the political turmoil, and the future of Egypt.

WHAT THE CHURCH WAS MEANT TO BE

On the Sunday (November 20th) after the initial days of the battle of Mohamed Mahmoud, the leadership of KDEC met together and decided that they wanted to use their building and the numerous doctors in their congregation to establish a small clinic to treat those injured in the protests. As Nagy, the church leader in charge of overseeing the clinic, told me, by 8 p.m. they had set up their clinic using just a small portion of the main courtyard that faces the back of the *Mugamma* on the edge of Tahrir Square. However, at 11 p.m., that evening doctors from the main field hospital that had been operating inside of Mohamed Mahmoud Street (the epicenter of the violence) came to Nagy and told him that the violence had become too intense in their original location and they needed to relocate their equipment and staff. Nagy was immediately interested in being able to use the church property in this way and called Pastor Sameh, who also gave his approval. Within an hour of this decision the field hospital at KDEC was fully functioning.

Church members organized the circulation of injured protestors, doctors, assistants, ambulances, medical supplies, and safety gear (goggles, gas masks, saline

sprays, etc.) in and out of the church property. My youth contacts spent most of their time in and around the church, carrying supplies and transferring injured men and women into and out of the church gate. The conversations that I had seemed to revolve mostly around the field hospital and frequency of statements like “this is what the church is supposed to be” indicated a general pride in the leadership’s decision to support protestors and the larger activist communities. Members emphasized to me the way that they were serving their country, healing religious divides, and bringing God’s love and healing. Even those who went to “the front lines” of Mohamed Mahmoud, where fierce skirmishes between the police and the protestors were leaving tens of people dead and thousands injured, seemed to reflect this service-orientation.

Nagy, however, was not just organizing the field clinic. He and his colleagues were also inundated with youth from the church coming to help the doctors in the clinic. At one point, he said, these youth were telling him that they wanted to do more than simply help in the clinic, they wanted to go into the Square. So, Nagy said that he and his colleagues, organized these youth into teams and sent them out with specific supplies (eye goggles, juices, water). They were told how to identify the frontline fighters who were most in need of these provisions and sent out in small teams to distribute the supplies and return to the church. But Nagy was quick to point out that none of these youth were engaged in “fighting” with the police. This moment at KDEC illustrates exactly the nexus between the institutionalized discourse from the pulpit and small group meetings of KDEC, the leadership of KDEC, and the political activism and engagement of devoted youth. The political imaginary cultivated by sermons and small groups was operationalized, embodied, in the way that these youth became actors in the political

space that was Tahrir Square and Mohamed Mahmoud during the November clashes. The enemy was not SCAF, the police forces, or the state apparatus, which meant that rocks were not to be thrown and “fighting” was not to be condoned. There was, however, a *real* battle being fought in the streets of downtown Cairo that they youth and leaders of KDEC could not ignore as injured young men came choking, unconscious, and bloody into the clinic. This *real* battle as the leadership has maintained throughout 2011 was a battle of spiritual forces and so the only effective weapons were those of piety –charity, service, and prayer.

I spent the evening of Saturday, November 19, following Maged, a tall and lanky 24-year-old with shortly cropped hair and trendy chunky glasses, between the Square, Mohamed Mahmoud Street, and the church building. Maged spent hours on the front line, throwing rocks, chanting, and getting tear-gassed. I stayed back inside of Tahrir Square, on the lawn of the towering Mugamma, where a variety of makeshift tents and small snack vendors were set up. Every so often Maged would come back out to meet me with red, swollen eyes and a runny nose. He and his friend would smile and show off their wounds, welts from rubber shotgun pellets, or recount with relish the “bomb” of a tear gas canister that landed beside them causing them to make their frantic retreat to the lawn of the *Mugamma* away from the heavy fighting and gassing. We talked about the military and SCAF, but they seemed to have no real interest in overtly critiquing the excessive violence used by the military against civilians. Late into the night as I stood with Maged outside of the church waiting for a few of his friends to come back from a run of supplies to the front line, I asked him why he had decided to come out to the protests in the first place. He looked as if *through* the Mugamma, in the direction of

Mohamed Mahmoud, and then back at me and said, “Because I didn’t want to feel like I was too good for them, you know? I wanted to fight with the people of Egypt.”

This striking statement can be read on a couple of levels. From January 2011 through the end of the year there had been a concerted effort on the part of the Egyptian state apparatus and media outlets to characterize the protestors in the Square as *bultagayya*, that is, “thugs” who were intent on destroying the country. These *bultagayya* represent the poor, uneducated, and wildly religious (always Muslim) Egyptians who do not understand the proper practice of politics or take seriously the threat to stability that their demands wielded. In my many conversations with youth and leaders this framing has been used, especially after the January 2011 events, as a main deterrent to more sustained physical participation of the KDEC congregation. As a wealthy community, they seemed to find it difficult to relate to the demands for ‘bread and equality’ coming from the Square. In this sense, even those members of the church who spent all night during these days of bloodshed and uncertainty at the building, oversaw the field clinic, and championed the demands of the protestors seemed to position themselves as semi-outsiders in relation to the more desperate economic demands coming from the Square.

At the same time, though, congregants of KDEC also consistently communicated a heightened sense of precarity due to being part of the Christian minority in Egypt. As my female interlocutor from earlier in this chapter noted, this sense of cultural otherness and political marginality in Christian communities pervaded, either explicitly or implicitly, most of the conversations that I had at KDEC about these protests. As I indicated earlier this sense of precarity was the impetus for increased sympathy with ‘the

Square,' but it also functioned as a strong barrier to more active, and less ambiguous, backing of the protest movement.

CONCLUSION

After this first day that I spent with Maged and his friends, whenever I met Maged in the Square afterward, he had stopped fighting and was only running supplies from the church to the protestors: blankets, gas masks, saline solution, and water. Four days into the protest, I asked him what he thought would happen:

I don't know what will happen, but I hope that the protestors will pull out of Mohamed Mahmoud. There is enough violence already, enough dead. Everyone has paid too much. The army too, they know what they did and I think they are sorry.

This mapping of the activities of youth during the November 2011 protests is a particularly useful way of thinking about political imaginaries, activism, and church discourses at KDEC. From a willingness to stand on the front lines with those revolutionaries who threw rocks, chants, and tear gas containers back at the police lines outside of the Ministry of Interior, to this statement of almost pity for “the army” and for the wounded and embattled protestors, Maged’s experience in Tahrir expresses the negotiations that these youth at KDEC are trying to navigate. There is nothing extraordinary about Maged’s shifting praxis in the context of these protests, sit-ins, and revolutionary demands. Throughout 2011 the balance of power, the weight of public opinion, and media representations of what is happening in Tahrir have fluctuated widely. Nonetheless, Maged’s shift between militant protesting, prayer, and the running of supplies is an instructive movement that speaks to the authoritative discourses and subject-making practices at KDEC. As I have argued in this chapter, these engagements

are guided – shaped – by the institutionalized discourses in the forms of sermons and prayer meetings, as well as the self-disciplinary regimes of prayer and fasting connected to *Bait al-Salah*. This nexus of forces speaks to Bourdieu’s sense of habitus, with which I prefaced this study, in creating a “matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” out of which these youth act out their political aspirations and religious commitments (Bourdieu 1977: 72).

Because the center of power was always articulated at KDEC to be spiritual evil, the devil, and feelings of hatred or greed it was difficult for KDEC members to sustain a political protest like those of January and November 2011. On the other hand, however, because they found the center of power in these immaterial and supernatural places, they were motivated toward, and extremely consistent in, sustaining the caring services in the Square like food and blanket distribution and medical services in the midst of the protesting. These theological commitments and discourses create subjects for which direct physical violence against the state apparatuses becomes increasingly untenable even as these youth were articulating a stronger sense of connection to both the nation-state of Egypt and the revolutionary movements.

CHAPTER 3: BECOMING MODERN

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 2 I argue that the political imaginary at KDEC is largely defined by a unique appropriation of both secular-liberal political ideology – dedicated to human rights, representative democracy, and a strong separation of religious metaphysical claims from the public realm of politics – and a non-liberal and charismatically inflected view of spiritual evil and efficacy of prayer and piety to transform the material conditions of Egypt. In this chapter I focus on historicizing and contextualizing the modern desires that undergird the strong commitment that youth and leaders alike at KDEC sustain toward the secular-liberal democracy project. I begin with a review of how the literature in the anthropology of Christianity has conceptualized the interface between modernity and Protestant Christianity and then provide a short historical sketch of the way that the missionizing efforts of the Anglo-American Presbyterians cultivated and made possible certain desires for modernity. I also show that the desire for the modern subject was a highly contentious terrain through the Evangelical Egyptian church’s history, drawing on the work of Heather Sharkey (2005; 2006). During 2011 the modernity question in Egypt (and in literature on Egypt) most often centered on the compatibility of Islamist movements with late liberal democratic norms and the ideologies of the modern subject that inhabit them. Ostensibly drawing on this global discourse, the Evangelicals that I spoke with during my fieldwork often articulated their modern subjectivity and aspirations against the backdrop of supposed “pre-modern” Salafis.

With this historical and contemporary landscape in mind, I then parse out two modern desires that are strongly and consistently articulated at KDEC during 2011. The first of these themes is the language of freedom, justice, and democracy as the supposed goals of the revolution in the Square and the reasons for the pro-revolutionary sympathies of the leaders and youth of KDEC. These secular-liberal values were read both as biblical virtues, properly embraced by all Christians, and also “human” values, properly embraced by all humans beings. At KDEC freedom, justice, and democracy were the ubiquitous and unanimously accepted demands of the revolution and the most compelling reason for the church to back the revolution. The second theme is the desire to be a modern citizen. This conception of the ideal citizen differed very little in character from one interlocutor to the next. He (or she) was open minded, brave, and honest, an unflinching follower of daily news and a capable articulator of her opinions, though willing to see both sides to any story. Just as striking as this uniform description of an ideal citizen was the consistency with which most of my interlocutors insisted that they did not live up to its expectations. In this sense, most of my interlocutors saw themselves and other congregants as this ideal citizen in the making undergoing training to be modern. The site for this training was the church and its services.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY AND MODERNITY

The modernity narrative has been one of the most important reference points for anthropological analysis of Christianity and is perhaps the main reason why the preponderance of academic work on Christianity has focused on Protestant Christianity. The most familiar story is of course that of Max Weber’s famous investigation into the

resonances between the ethical and metaphysical claims of Calvinist Protestants and the spirit of capitalism. The view that, as sociologist Peter Berger phrased it, Protestantism “enters modernity as a fish enters water” continues to be the predominant analytic framework in which Protestant, and especially evangelical, religious communities are thought to interface with modernity; that is, effortlessly (as quoted in Ranger 2003:117).

Perhaps the reason for such analytic attention is also due to the fact that in the last decades of the twentieth century anthropology itself underwent a kind of self-reflection on its own implication not just in the modernist narrative but also in the Christian metaphysical claims that made anthropology as a discipline possible. As Fenella Cannell asserts in her introduction to the compilation *The Anthropology of Christianity*, anthropology’s attitude toward Christianity was “both an attempt to separate from Christian metaphysics and a simultaneous assimilation of key ideas derived from those metaphysics” (2006:5). This is, in fact, the argument that I have already noted of Talal Asad (1993), namely that anthropology’s conception of religion is so deeply embedded in and dependent upon a modern Christian genealogy that it has limited use for studying non-Christian or pre-modern Christian religious systems. This history and literature culminated in the reality that “the prevailing orthodoxy for several decades has been a focus on the seeming inevitability of secularization and of the advance of global modernity” (Cannell 2006:3).

However, in recent years scholars have struggled to nuance the inevitability of what Cannell calls the “Protestant-capitalist nexus” and to elucidate the kinds of historical, social, and political contingencies that lead to processes noted as “modern” – that is individualizing, interiorizing, and embedding subjects in a market economy

(2006:31). One of the most salient examples of this scholarship has been done on what has been called alternatively the “faith gospel” or the “prosperity gospel” in which adherents are encouraged to invest small monetary gifts in the church or its ministries that will result in God blessing them with even larger monetary returns. As one author has noted, the prosperity gospel looks like one “elaborate transaction” in a capitalist market (Ukah 2005:263). In contrast, other writers have argued that however much the language of the prosperity gospel mirrors the investments, dividends, and returns of a capitalist economy, “much of the language of prosperity preachers is shot through with references to quintessentially Maussian notions of debt-incurring, relationship-generating gifts,” – in other words, these notions can also be read as rooted in a non-capitalist gift exchange economy (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008:1149). As more and more attention has been paid to the actual language, subject making, and relational networks of Protestant communities, scholars have conceded that the fact that Protestantism can “at once be read as championing modernity and challenging [it] is indicative of Christianity’s deep heterogeneity” (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008:1151).

Indeed, this project suggests not only that the modernity narrative and the making of modern subjects has been part and parcel of the Evangelical Egyptian experience since its inception, but also that, as the literature on the anthropology of Christianity shows, the interface of Evangelical Christianity and modernity has not been as straight-forward as the classic Weberian story suggests. As I argued in chapter 2, this history is marked by negotiations that cannot be understood using this simplistic modernist teleology. In their 2008 review on the literature in the anthropology of Christianity, the authors suggest that this ambiguity “emphasizes the relative autonomy of Christianity as a cultural complex

[and] underscores how multifarious Christianity is as an anthropological object” (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008:1151). Certainly this assertion is true as far as it goes, but this heterogeneity cannot simply be a product of the “cultural complex” that is Christianity.²⁵ Instead I would argue that this heterogeneity is a product of not just the heterogeneity inherent in so-called Christianity, but also a function of the contingencies of history. As Ruth Marshall argues, “the relationship between the political and religious is an eminently historical one” (2009:19). With this in mind I turn to one of the most important historical moments of Evangelicalism in Egypt: the Anglo-American missionary encounter.

EVANGELICAL MISSIONS IN EGYPT

When the Anglo-American missionaries first came to Egypt in 1854 they brought with them not just a set of Protestant doctrines but also a whole variety of cultural assumptions, desires, and values that were strongly shaped by U.S. post-Enlightenment societal mores. As Sharkey insists, “[w]ith their receptiveness to change, belief in social progress, and respect for individualism [...] one could say that the American missionaries were decidedly ‘modern’” (2006:173). In some very important ways this modernity pervaded their thoroughly Protestant projects like leadership training, church planting, and Bible reading classes. In a trend that has been repeated worldwide where Protestant missions are successful, the Evangelical community in Egypt was

²⁵ This is the same argument that Joel Robbins uses when he calls for an anthropology of Christianity that pays “more attention to the distinctive *content* of Christian institutions and expressions, both in recent times and over the long term” (2007:18)

...increasingly literate – at a time when literacy in Egypt was very limited. While this drive toward literacy reflected the Protestant imperative to equip individual worshippers to read the Bible – in this case, the Arabic Bible – one consequence of Bible-centered Arabic literacy acquisition was to empower Evangelicals in the long run educationally, professionally, and economically... (Sharkey 2006:172)

This was, of course, not the case for all Evangelicals in Egypt, many of whom are illiterate and live in very economically depressed conditions (especially those in rural villages in Upper Egypt). Nevertheless, KDEC represents this trend of economic and educational advancement among the Evangelical elite.

But the Evangelical Egyptian community, especially in regard to gender roles and familial relationships, did not always adopt these modern assumptions of the Anglo-American missionaries so easily. Given the strong modern aspirations of KDEC that undergird youth and leader's in their political aspirations, it is perhaps surprising that one of the most important productive tensions in the history of the Egyptian Evangelical Church has been this very question of the desirability of U.S. American modernity, which Sharkey notes was a pervasive and constitutive split early on in the Egyptian Evangelical Church's history. Many of the tensions between the Egyptian Evangelical pastors and the American Presbyterian missionaries revolved around these questions of modern subjectivity, which for the latter were founded upon their aforementioned "belief in social progress, and respect for individualism" (2006:173). In the earlier twentieth century, these fissures began to show themselves, especially in regard to family relations and gender roles. Whereas the American Presbyterian missionaries encouraged women to study the Bible, engage in church social activities, and take up preaching and evangelization, Egyptian Evangelical pastors were often wary of a variety of new gender conventions like taking down the wooden partitions that separated the men and women

during church services, increased socialization between engaged couples, and increasing participation of women in teaching and Bible study in the local church (Sharkey 2006:173).²⁶

In summary, Sharkey explains the forces at play in this tension:

In this period, attitudes toward both evangelization and the public role of women reflected the very different American and Egyptian experiences of public life, and translated into different conceptions of what good Christian behavior might entail. The experience of this period also serve as a reminder that the Evangelical pastors were part of the fabric of Egypt's Islamic society and that their Christian faith did not preclude them from sharing cultural and social assumptions with their Muslim neighbors. (2006:175)

There is much that is instructive about the way that Sharkey chooses to describe these power relations as never simply played out in the field of "religion" but also encompassing "social" and "cultural" aspects. This dichotomy, however, between the modern American life-ways and the Islamic-traditional Egyptian life-ways is highly problematic as a framework for understanding the complexity of the landscape of power

²⁶ In fact, one of the most poignant historical examples of this split is the so-called "Umm Kulthum affair" of 1938 in which Evangelical Egyptian pastors vehemently denounced the decision of the founder of the American University in Cairo, Charles Watson (the son of two of the earliest Anglo-American missionaries to Egypt and an influential Presbyterian leader in his own right) to invite the Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum to perform at the newly established university. While Watson maintained close ties with both the American Presbyterians and the Egyptian Evangelical church, he founded AUC as a non-evangelical institution that welcomed students of any religious faith. When he invited the Egyptian Broadcasting Service to use the school's auditorium for the monthly radio broadcasts of Umm Kulthum's music, Egyptian Evangelicals pastors responded with a concerted campaign to prevent what they saw as a scandalous and improper debacle that would bring shame to Egyptian Evangelicals. This event, among others less well-known, starkly indicates the "difference between the attitudes of American missionaries and Egyptian pastors regarding sexuality, entertainment, and the public role of women" (Heather J. Sharkey 2006:175). This incident is even more poignant for a contemporary attendee of KDEC, in which a choir of five to ten people, the majority of whom are usually women, always leads the music for the church services. Even though the main worship leader is usually male, in my experience at the church, women are much more common as public leaders in the music part of KDEC services.

in this colonial-mission moment. Certainly, as Sharkey's account indicates there were important negotiations taking place between different conceptions of appropriate gender roles, church functioning, and the religious life. Nevertheless, these negotiations hardly oscillated between "the Christian modern" and "the Islamic traditional." As Sharkey herself has pointed out, the vast majority of the Egyptian Evangelicals came not from Muslim communities but from Coptic communities, with substantially different conceptions of gender relations, religious authority, and piety than their Islamic neighbors.

More importantly, however, it is clear from the literature of Anglo-American missionaries and early colonial writers that they saw the Coptic Orthodox and the Muslim Egyptians as similar in their "primitive" religious practices and sensibilities. It is this primitiveness that Western modernity saw its task to transform. Paul Sedra's (2011) work on educational reform in Coptic Orthodox communities and the role played by evangelical missionaries is an example of scholarship that seeks to understand how the disciplinary regimes, metaphysical and ethical assumptions about piety and morality that came into negotiations during the colonial moment in Egypt cannot be mapped onto this modernist teleology from "primitive" to "modern." It might be easy to read the history of Evangelical Egyptians as a particularly straightforward instance of colonial co-option but such a reading would fall too easily into teleological fallacy. Doing so would also foreclose one's ability to distinguish the dialogic processes of Christian belonging and subject making, as well as national belonging and citizen making, that have constituted an important part of being Evangelical in Egypt. In particular, the desire for the modern

has been a constitutive part of the class position and demographic make-up of KDEC, arguably the most visible of the Evangelical Egyptian communities.

A CHURCH YOU CANNOT BE NEUTRAL ABOUT

The KDEC church property is large and accessible to the public. Unlike a Coptic Orthodox church, permanently infused with the odor of incense, with icons of saints and martyrs filling the walls, and golden candle holders and incense burners adorning the front stage, the sanctuary of KDEC looks more like a medium-size theater. The off-white stone walls are largely unadorned, except for modest black lamps protruding from the walls and lining the entire sanctuary and, on the west- and east-facing walls, a series of 20-foot-tall stained-glass windows depicting a variety of iconic biblical scenes. On the wall of the front stage facing the audience and over-looking the pastor's pulpit another stained-glass window of the same size depicts Jesus hanging on a cross. During the morning services (there are not many of them) the light filters in through these brightly colored mosaics, and in the evening they are lit by florescent lights installed behind the glass. But the main light for the meeting comes from the four large, simple, black chandeliers that hang from the high ceiling. Perhaps it is due to the high ceiling, but when one enters the sanctuary when it is empty the room feels desolate and peaceful. There is no superfluous decoration, even on the stage. A large piano sits in the left corner and a few tall leafy plants sit among the amplifiers and a large keyboard on the right corner. In the very middle of the stage and set to the front a plain glass pulpit faces the audience and a white cross with what appears to be either a dove or a tongue of fire (both symbols of the Holy Spirit, which plays a large part in both theology and corporate worship in

charismatic Christianity) is engraved on its thick stand. Everything about the sanctuary space is a picture of restraint and austerity. There are four podiums set up in the midst of the pews for mounting the recording equipment to broadcast the services. The physical *space* of KDEC is a very modern space: economical and programmatic. Even the worship service has much more in common with an U.S. American evangelical worship service than a Coptic Orthodox Mass.

But during the meetings, however, these material details fade into the background. Attendees navigate hundreds of bodies meandering through rows upon rows of pews. The sounds of friends and families catching up on life and greeting strangers reverberate through the sanctuary in the twenty minutes leading up to the main services. Especially during the Friday morning, Sunday night and Monday night services, the pews continue to fill up throughout the first twenty minutes of the sermon as families finally emerge from the congested streets leading to Tahrir Square. The organization of the space, the structure of the service, the number of families that arrive in private transportation, and the dress of the congregation all index its elite class position.

In order to get a better understanding of how KDEC was seen in Egyptian Evangelicalism I spoke with a woman named Nadia, who is deeply embedded in the world of Egyptian Evangelicalism but not a member or attendee of KDEC, about the position of this particular church community. Nadia was unequivocal about the distinctive position that KDEC holds, naming a number of innovative projects of KDEC that are only possible both because of its access to resources and its willingness to experiment with new types of service projects. These initiatives included their drug rehabilitation program for youth struggling with substance and drug abuse, summer

sports camps for high school and college students, and series of annual conferences that regularly draw tens of thousands of attendees. All of these particular projects are hosted at their multi-million-pound retreat center, *Bait al-Wadi*. In addition to these projects, weekly youth services are said to regularly attract three thousand young adults (from 17- to 30-year-old non-married men and women). It was clear to me in the interview that, as a committed Evangelical, Nadia approved of a great deal of what KDEC did in terms of service projects, preaching events, and general teaching. At the same time, she also said that this kind of innovation does not come without some exceptional level of autonomy and, as it were, controversy. As she informed me repeatedly, KDEC “is a church that you can’t be neutral about.”

“There is a joke in the Synod,” she said smiling, “that there are four denominations in Egypt: the Orthodox, the Catholic, the Evangelicals, and Kasr el Dohara.” This joke indexes the ambivalent position of KDEC in Egyptian Evangelicalism, as an obvious and iconic example of its denomination but also an institution with a great deal of autonomy from the Synod of the Nile and its own power structures. Nadia, for the most part, framed this story of KDEC’s autonomy as a function of its innovative ministry projects: that is, as a reflection of its charismatic leanings and worship styles, its large and expensive sports camps, and its broadcasting of sermons and teaching series by leading pastors. In the conversation, however, she also spoke to what is perhaps a more obvious reason for the kind of autonomy KDEC has garnered: its class position.

The demographic weight of Egyptian Evangelicalism traditionally had remained in Upper Egypt, around Asyut (also the region of Egypt with the highest Coptic Orthodox

percentages). Davida Finney, an American Presbyterian minister wrote, in 1939 that she estimated that about eighty-three percent of Evangelicals lived in villages. However, in 2005, Tharwat Wahba, a theologian at the Evangelical Theological Seminary suggested to Heather Sharkey that the Egyptian Evangelical church is split evenly between rural and urban environments. This rapid urbanization is a trend that Evangelicals share with the broader population of Egypt in the 20th century (2006:178).

At the same time, urbanization has led to a variety of implications in the 21st century for the Evangelical Egyptian church. First of all, it has led to a pervasive dichotomy at churches, the Seminary, and the Synod, between urban and rural churches and the correlating disparity between these sections of the Evangelical Egyptian community. In this sense, KDEC in the heart of downtown Cairo, is a quintessentially urban congregation. Among other things, this means that the congregation is more varied socio-economically, educationally, and professionally than most of the smaller rural congregations, due to the social and physical mobility that characterizes urban populations. It also means that KDEC has greater access to international funding, press, and teaching. The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Abbassia (a neighbor of Cairo that is also the seat of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch) is the theological training ground for all Evangelical pastors in Egypt. This close-knit community feels the disproportion acutely. As Nadia pointedly noted,

Pastor Sameh would have laid his head on the same bed in the same dormitory over there at the Seminary as a pastor out in Minya [one of the largest city centers in Upper Egypt]. But Sameh is on TV every day, has a huge amount of foreign connections and fame in the region, while that country pastor is trying to just provide for his family and get through a community college. There is a sense of justice and equality that is frustrated by this situation.

This positionality vis-à-vis the broader Evangelical Egyptian establishment is, in part, what has allowed KDEC to promote the kinds of participation in revolutionary protests in the Square that they have. Their class position has given them access to wide broadcasting networks, media visibility, and resources, both in material terms (e.g., their hosting of the medical clinic) and in terms of their large congregational base from which to draw volunteers for street cleaning, resource distribution during protests, and a large conveniently located building for gatherings). In some sense, then, KDEC is a particularly striking example of the modernist desires in Egyptian Evangelicalism, but its success has not come without significant new and important tensions.

The trope of modernity is utilized widely at KDEC, and historically it has been used to distinguish between urban churches and rural churches, as well as between Orthodox and Evangelical Christians. In this sense, it has an important inter-denominational purchase in conversations about how one's religious community sees the values of liberalism, the responsibilities of the citizen, or the proper relation of the human being to the capitalist economy. This concern and desire for the "modern" shapes Evangelicalism in Egypt broadly and KDEC particularly but the discourse of modernity, implicated as it has been in colonial imaginings and governance, has also had serious ramifications for the way that Muslim Egyptian political and social organizations navigate their position in the nation-state of Egypt. For decades the public discourse about modernity in Egypt has revolved not around Evangelicalism, but around Islam as a religious complex, and, in particular, political Islamist groups.

ISLAM AND MODERNITY

As I note in chapter 2, and elaborate more fully in chapter 4, one of the hallmarks of modern democracies and statecraft is the cordoning off of the public political arena of human life from the private religious arena of human life. This is one of the ideologies that are identified with secularism, or what has been called the *secularization thesis*. It continues to be one of the most important litmus tests for determining the “modernity” of any given community or nation. Importantly for my purposes, it is one of the leading reasons why many people who are committed to secular-liberal democratic values express deep reservations toward political Islamists. In *The Challenge of Political Islam: Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State* (2010), Rachel Scott articulates what has become in international media a hegemonic assumption about Islamists and their political projects:

It is often assumed that Islamists are seeking to reinstall a type of religious state – in which religion and state are unified – that existed at some idealized point in Islamic history. Implicit in this view is the assumption that Islam has a specific theory on politics and the state, which the Islamic revivalists are attempting to implement anew. (2010:12)

Scott goes on to challenge this simplistic and historically naïve picture of what Islam is in-and-of-itself, as well as the apparent transparency of the categories of “state” and “religion.” During the 18 days in Tahrir and after the removal of Hosni Mubarak from the presidency, the supposed pre-modern, backwards, and illiberal character of political Islamists – ranging from the moderate, free market *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (The Muslim Brotherhood) to the socially and theologically conservative Salafi *Hizb al-Nour* (al-Nour Party) – became the locus of widely expressed anxiety about, in particular, religious minorities. This anxiety was compounded by the fact that in the first parliamentary elections in November-December 2011, the MB’s Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and

the Salafi al-Nour Party won 47 percent and 24 percent of the available seats respectively (Muslim Brotherhood Tops Egyptian Poll Result 2012).

Several of my interlocutors saw the MB as a relatively benign Islamist party, misguided in their emphasis on “Islam as the solution” but interested in safeguarding the rights and dignity of the Christian minority. The vast majority of interlocutors that I spoke with, however, were deeply troubled by the MB and its success in Egyptian elections. Even more troubling for congregants at KDEC, however, was the increased visibility and political power garnered by the Salafis and their political arm the al-Nour Party. The word *salafi* (plural: *salafiyyun*) refers to one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. Contemporary Salafi movements have primarily come out of the Arabian Peninsula and seek to return to the early practice and ethos of the Prophet’s contemporaries, rejecting what they see as corrupted traditions of Islamic law and ethics. They are often associated with the literal interpretation of the Qūran, and rigid and socially conservative norms surrounding dress, gender roles and relations, and they are often characterized as disinterested in formal political participation.²⁷

²⁷ It is common for *Salafis* to be called in English news media ‘fundamentalists,’ which indicates the kind of framework that western readers use to make sense of the socio-cultural position of the *Salafis*. As Susan Harding convincingly pointed out in her watershed article “Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other” (1991), “fundamentalism” in the U.S.A. had become a marker not of a particular theological orientation but rather of a group of people defined by their *reaction against* modernity. As Harding argues “the voices of modernity employ the opposition between fundamentalist and modern in history, producing a naturalizing narrative of the progressive spread of modern ideas, at times lamentably thwarted by outbursts of reactive and reactionary fundamentalist fervor” (Harding 1991:374). At least for Western audiences, the term “fundamentalist” is always and already a statement about a subject’s modernness. My own research shows that this same teleology is involved, albeit in a different context and with a variety of different inflections, in how Evangelical Egyptians see the *Salafi* movement, as an anti-modern reactionary force.

As I intend to show in the rest of this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis, during this moment in Egypt, Islamists in general, and the Salafis in particular became for Evangelical Egyptians a sort of ‘repugnant other’ in Susan Harding’s terms. They are the Other against which Evangelicals defined for me the self in many different contexts, but most importantly in the context of political subjects and citizens. In conversation after conversation, the trope was repeated: Salafis are anti-democratic. Evangelicals are democratic. Salafis are uneducated, socially backwards, and authoritarian. Evangelicals are open-minded, socially progressive, and desire freedom.

DESIRING THE MODERN: DISCOURSES AT KDEC

In the rest of this chapter I intend to trace some of the discourses, like the above, at KDEC that are made possible by the constellation of political, historical, and class trajectories that I have indicated thus far. Evangelicals at KDEC are navigating not just their own social history in the colonial moment, but also the current moment of debate in Egypt over what citizenship will look like in a post-Mubarak Egypt. The two discourses that I focus on in this section are the secular-liberal language of freedom, justice, and democracy and the ideal citizen. In a variety of contexts these discourses both articulated and cultivated a desire for modernity at KDEC that was often defended against the Islamist Other.

FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND DEMOCRACY

On November 28, 2011, the first parliamentary elections since the overthrow of Mubarak’s regime, Egyptians flocked to the polls to participate in what was widely hailed as the first free election in Egyptian history. For many secularists, liberals, and

Christians in Egypt, however, the historic event ended up being both frightening and disappointing. The unofficial counts that came out in the following days had the largest Salafi al-Nour Party receiving 24 percent of the vote.

When I arrived at the Friday morning service on December 2, the atmosphere of excitement and apprehension that had seemed to grip the community throughout the violent protests of Mohamed Mahmoud Street in late November and the run-up to the elections seemed to have dissipated. Pastor Sameh Maurice, who had been a steady, if sometimes hesitantly vocal, supporter of the protest movement in Tahrir Square, came on stage more formally dressed than usual in a white, open-collar, button down shirt and dark black blazer. His tone was somber and at times pleading with the congregation, as he leaned forward and gestured to the front rows of the large assembly room. The congregation was hushed and attentive as he whispered emphatically, “Please, please listen carefully. Fix your eyes on God, not on these events. Do not fight because the battle is not yours.” Pastor Sameh was quoting an ancient scriptural story of the righteous Israelite king Jehoshaphat. Surrounded by enemies on every side, instead of sending troops out to battle, the king went to the temple and prayed a prayer of deliverance. A prophet was sent to Jehoshaphat in response to this extraordinary faith with the command, “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.”²⁸ Pastor Sameh repeats these negative imperatives repeatedly, “Do not be afraid!” “Do not be discouraged!”

²⁸ This story found in 1 Chronicles 20, was the most ubiquitous biblical reference that I heard at KDEC by which pastors, leaders, and congregants articulated their own vulnerability and a sense

Finally, Pastor Sameh says something that I have never heard him say before. He says that in January there were only two options open to people: yes to the revolution or no to the revolution. Pastor Sameh said that at KDEC, however, people were not constrained by these two options: “But at Kasr el Dohara we said we agree with the demands of democracy, justice, and dignity. It’s not that we are with the revolution but we are with these biblical ideas: freedom, justice, and dignity.”

I am surprised by this intentional ambiguity that Pastor Sameh conveys between not being for a revolutionary moment while at the same time extolling the ideals behind it. But it seems that given the situation to which he speaks, he also struggles with what these events mean and how they could have happened. He elucidates the situation thus:

Freedom is basic to humanity and I think that we all need to be free. To be human is to be free. Real democracy is to submit to the majority, to listen to those who express themselves. But who has the upper hand? Satan! [he raises his voice and pumps his fist at the ceiling, a rare display of aggressive emotion for this morning] And the majority has chosen Satan.

Like the comments of the worship pastor from the previous chapter, the work of Satan here is not to be read as demonic possession ending in maniacal behavior but rather in terms of the ethics of everyday life. The church, and the secular-liberal politics that Pastor Sameh argues are basic to it, are the forces of love towards others motivated by God and unleashed by prayer and honesty. In Sameh’s view illiberal politics (defined most importantly in this context by the Islamists’ mixing of politics and religion) are forces of hatred, sectarianism, and disregard for proper human rights. Pastor Sameh does

of helplessness. It was also, interestingly, used by some of the more politically active members as a derogatory marker of the church’s general political apathy.

not disparage or call into question the legitimacy of ‘democracy’ and its freedom story. And, it is, in fact, this very commitment to electoral politics, political representation, and representative democracy that seems to create the painful tension that Pastor Sameh tries to alleviate in this sermon. The underlying question: If Christianity is about democracy, and democracy has been enacted in this parliamentary election, how is it possible that a “non-democratic” Islamist parliament could be voted into power? If KDEC, as a faithful prophetic church, has supported and encouraged God’s “shaking” of the region, how could God have let this happen to them?

At KDEC the 18-day “revolution” of January 25 was primarily and fundamentally about this freedom story. At its most basic level the demands of the Square were read at KDEC as a way of securing these “basic” human rights of representative democracy, and the freedoms of religion, speech, and assembly. Moreover, as I discuss in the previous chapter, this freedom story has been the primary way that this group of affluent and well-educated Evangelicals were able to enter into the demands and ethos of the revolutionary protest movements of 2011 and 2012. Evangelicalism in Egypt has been from its inception a messy and contingent process of creating what some have called the modern “self-identical heroic subject” (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008:1152) that is the carrier of not only the rights of religious freedom and speech but also the responsibility for making rational decisions in the interest of the public good. While the values of secular-liberal democracy were the primary framing language used in sermons and public declarations, the cultivation of this *ideal* citizen was the primary discursive space that leaders at KDEC engaged in their work with youth (and congregants at large) in the church, a subject to which I now turn.

THE SHAPING OF MODERN CITIZENS

As I discuss in the chapter 4, although most congregants of KDEC see secularism as a natural and necessary separation of religion from politics, there is a context in which I heard a variety of people speak about the overlap between these two separate spheres: citizenship.

The ideal citizen at KDEC, as I noted earlier, is this open-minded, brave, and honest articulator of her own opinions, and unflagging follower of the daily news in Egypt. What is perhaps most striking about this description is the way that the ideal citizen is defined primarily by her inward dispositions and intellectual activity. This was illustrated to me in a focus group that I attended for the leaders of the Political Activism Committee.²⁹ This committee was comprised primarily of lay leaders in the church, and headed by two paid staff, one of whom was Nagy from chapter 2. The leaders at the focus group said that the committee was formed at the behest of the senior leadership of KDEC, as a response to the growing prominence in the media of the KDEC, “the Church in the Square.” As David, one of the main leaders, said: “We were very pioneer because we were the first Christian people that went out to the Square on behalf of all the Christians in the nation.” With this prominence came a need for a contingent of staff and lay leaders to handle this engagement. The tasks of the committee were three-fold: to handle the image of KDEC to the outside media; to educate and raise awareness in the

²⁹ This focus group was funded by and part of a research project for Christian Solidarity Worldwide (<http://csw.org.uk>) a human rights advocacy group for issues of sectarian violence and religious freedom.

congregation of KDEC about the political events and processes that were happening in Egypt; to serve as a liaison between KDEC and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

At one point in the focus group, one leader touted the political involvement of another member of the group exclaiming that she was “very active” on social networking sites. He said, “She follows the events and shares them with people. They organize debates and conversations [on these sites] and invite people to join them.” Indeed, the Political Activism Committee saw its main goal as bringing awareness to the congregation of KDEC by way of social networking sites, seminars, and informative drama productions. Throughout my time at KDEC those congregants who were pointed out to me as “politically active” were, with the exception of the two main leaders of the Political Activism Committee, primarily considered so because of their daily consumption of news and their own output of informed opinions both in personal encounters and through electronic media.

This desire for the modern subject that is motivated by one’s own intellectual commitments and not dependent on familial and religious coercions is widely replicated at KDEC. The leaders that I spoke with were careful to explain that their awareness campaigns were not motivated by a need to tell people who to vote for, but to educate people about the political options available to them.³⁰ The firm insistence on this

³⁰ In fact, this was the distinction most often invoked to defend why KDEC was not crossing the line of secularism by involving religion in politics. I was often told that the danger of involving religion in politics was that congregations might abrogate their decision-making to a religious leader. Since they were not enforcing particular political parties on their congregation, they were not misusing religious authority in the political sphere.

“freedom of opinion” indicates how integral cultivating the ideal citizen is for leaders at KDEC.

David suggested in a personal conversation months later that, in fact, it was in the creation and socialization of the ideal citizen that the political and the religious found their most profound commonalities:

[The] political is about taking care of the health, honor, and safety. It’s about getting basic needs met in honorable ways. It’s about enjoying the freedom of assembly, faith, and speech...If this is political, what is religious? Religion is about taking care of the health, honor, and safety of people. It is the same! Religion does this by creating good citizens – a good citizen for himself, for his society, for his family. In order to create a good citizen you have to educate and feed them. This is the task of both politics and religion. Both create good citizens. Good citizens care about other citizens.

Although the contention David makes here that religion has the same role as the political, is stronger than that of other interlocutors, the idea that the interface of religion and politics is the *good citizen* was a pervasive and generally un-contested idea among the leadership of KDEC. Just as David articulates here, these same leaders are constantly engaged in a discourse about good-citizen-building as an appropriate project for the church.

Just as David insists the socialization and formation of good citizens is a responsibility of religion, the leadership of KDEC went to great lengths during 2011 to provide contexts in which to teach its youth the appropriate disposition, activity, and emotional attachments of the ideal citizen. As already indicated in chapter 2, I argue that an integral part of the *Bait al-Salah* movement is this emotional attachment of the ideal citizen to his national homeland. Youth who attended these meeting learned how to be

emotionally invested in the fate, both spiritual and material of Egypt. The leaders of the Political Activism Committee, however, often had reservations about making prayer the *only* mode of political participation. They instead provided other contexts at the church that encouraged a more “active” participation in the political and revolutionary processes outside of the church. These activities – like picking up trash and painting sidewalks, distributing drinks and blankets, providing medical services and shelter for activists’ planning activities – also in important ways communicated and confirmed for youth what being a good citizen means. And like the *Bait al-Salah* meetings, the primary goal of these citizen-building activities was the cultivation of love for one’s country, investment in the public space and population of Egypt.

One of David’s colleagues and a fellow member on the Political Activism Committee, Nagy, voiced a similar sentiment to me when I spoke with him about the Mohamed Mahmoud violent protests that shook downtown Cairo and led to KDEC’s decision to accommodate an important field clinic. Nagy was the KDEC leader that I mentioned in chapter 2 who oversaw the operations of the clinic and dealt directly with the doctors who came to use KDEC’s space after their original location behind the Hardee’s restaurant in Mohamed Mahmoud became impossible to sustain. During the nearly week-long violence between protestors and police, Nagy had spent every night in the Square organizing youth volunteers, being the liaison with the upper-tier of the church authority, and running blankets, food, and supplies to the front lines of Mohamed Mahmoud. Nagy described his experience during that week as being in a horror movie with the smell of gas and smoke everywhere and the frantic and unpredictable rush of the crowds away from shot gun pellets or tear gas canisters. It was this experience in the

Square in November that had galvanized his own commitment to the political process but also to revolutionary protest against the ruling military elite. Whereas David was much more concerned with the material demands and responsibilities of the Egyptian state toward the citizens, Nagy primarily articulated the demands of citizenship in terms of acts of love and kindness toward fellow citizens (piety), being able to be moved emotionally on behalf of one's country (affectivity), and thinking and praying positively for its betterment (prayer). In this sense, the same themes that were foundational for how KDEC leaders and youth saw their intervention in January 2011 formed his habitus for engaging the Mohamed Mahmoud protests but also pervaded the language that he employed for answering what a *good* citizen might look like. I once asked him what he meant by a good citizen:

We are trying to help our people to not separate themselves spiritually and be really Egyptian in the society. Don't be just in the church then your work and school and college. Don't just pray for the country inside the church and when you go to college just feel upset and afraid about some Muslim movements and from the things that are going on. Be positive. That is your role. Pray. Act in the society. Help people. Love people. Love this country.³¹

As one of the main leaders of the Political Activism Committee, Nagy was also fundamentally committed to getting more congregants to be involved in political parties, to follow news media more critically and consistently, and to engage with the variety of

³¹ Here Nagy is building upon a familiar narrative of inward-turning of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the wake of Nasser's Arab nationalism and the increased Islamization of the Egyptian national identity (for a conventional example of this narrative see chapter 5, "Egyptian Christians," in Osman 2011). In the second half of the twentieth century the Coptic Orthodox Church greatly increased its role in the educational, social, and political life of Coptic Orthodox Christians, a move that led to characterizations of Coptic Christians as a "state within the state." While this is narrative is an important larger subtext to this statement, it should also be read as a reflection on the discourses of alienation and marginalization that I referred to in chapter 2, which dissuaded large numbers of the congregation from participating in the protests.

protest movements that filled the year 2011. But for Nagy, as for David and Pastor Sameh, the ideal citizen is also marked by a kind of *affective* and *personal* connection to the nation of Egypt and to the Egyptian people. The cultivation of this kind of citizen, especially among the youth of KDEC, was seen by the leaders as one of the most important responsibilities of KDEC.

EMERGING SUBJECTS AND SENSIBILITIES

An example of one such youth, Mina, a twenty-five year old student at Ain Shams University, was one of my very favorite interlocutors. He was always enthusiastic about speaking with me. He introduced me to more congregants than anyone else I knew, and he sent me links and information about events he thought would be relevant to my project. In the field I often felt like I was trudging through knee-deep molasses I always appreciated the extra effort Mina expended on behalf of my work. The first time that I first met him at the Thursday night youth service when his small group leader forced him to translate the forty-five minute long sermon to me. He translated the whole thing, painfully and with a great deal of discomfort, asking me if I understood after nearly every sentence. It was a couple of months before I got the chance to sit with Mina and ask him about the Tahrir protests. We sat on the ground in the large courtyard of the church building, leaning against the outdoor pillars; he laughingly remarked about being “too high class” to sit on the floor.

Mina was born and raised in Jordan, where his father worked at a hotel, and he had only moved back to his homeland of Egypt six years earlier to go to college. He lives in a lower- and working-class neighborhood in Cairo with his father, mother, and three brothers. Unlike many of the youth that I worked with, Mina’s family was Coptic

Orthodox. In his late teen years, he had converted to Evangelicalism (as had, incidentally, all three of his brothers). Upset by his conversion, his family had asked an Orthodox priest to visit his house over the course of several months to encourage him to re-join his natal church, but Mina said that he could not go back because he “didn’t see God in that church.” Two of his brothers also attended KDEC, and his parents had eventually made peace with their sons’ departure from the Coptic Orthodox establishment. Mina told me that he was at the church three or four days a week – for the *Bait al-Salah* Wednesday night shift, the Thursday night youth service, weekly practices for the drama club (which created, produced, and acted in skits for the purpose of teaching young adults in Cairo and in Upper Egypt how to live an appropriate and upright Christian life), and on Fridays for his small group which consisted of ten of his peers and two older church leaders.

I spoke with Mina shortly after the Maspero massacre, which left 20 Coptic protestors dead, in March of 2011. One of the killed on that night was a close friend of Mina’s, a neighbor and classmate. This friend was frequently alluded to in our conversations, and his death seemed to function for Mina as a watershed moment in his attitude toward and engagement with the Egyptian state and the Egyptian military. This change, however, was again primarily an affective change for Mina such that he began to “hate my government with all my heart.” In describing his friend, Mina said that “he was always talking about the poor people” and was convinced that the government was behind all incidents of sectarian violence. He said that he did not always agree with his friend’s opinions, but his commitment to the revolution and the price he paid for that commitment seemed to weigh heavily on Mina.

Mina's frustration with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and its sluggishness in bringing justice to the perpetrators of the violence at Maspero was evident throughout our conversation. The responses that I usually received from congregants at KDEC when speaking about SCAF were hesitant and, when critical, also sympathetic, like Maged's response in chapter 2. But Mina seemed uninterested in either subtlety or graciousness toward the ruling military elite. When I expressed surprise at his boldly articulated frustration at SCAF, he said, "Many Christians are very coward," a refrain that he revisited each time we spoke. This cowardice for Mina was twofold: a cowardice toward engaging the political parties, events, and legislations that were shaping the Egyptian political process, and a cowardice in regarding Muslims as, by and large, un-sympathetic towards the Christian minority. As if to shock me he said brazenly, "Some of the church were with Mubarak even in January. I know them! You want to talk to them? I will give you their names! [He points at my field notebook, smiles and pulls back]. No, no. It's ok."

This cowardice that Mina speaks of, however, was a lack of boldness in claiming one's rights from the state and from Islamist groups. To indicate both his own bravery and the Other that would take those rights, Mina told me a story about an encounter with a member of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP, the political party of the Muslim Brotherhood) in Heliopolis, an up-scale suburb of Cairo, who tried to convince him that he should vote for the FJP. Mina said he responded, "OK, but I am a Christian. What will you do for me?" This FJP representative insisted that his party was interested in safeguarding the rights of Egyptian Christians. Ready for this response, Mina challenged, "Well, OK then, I am a Buddhist. I worship the Buddha and it is a stone. This no God for

me. I am without a God. Will you give me my rights even if I don't have a God? Will you give me everything just because I am an Egyptian?" The punch-line to Mina's story was that the man walked away saying, "Ok, God be with you," a common Arabic and Islamic phrase that for Mina indicated the inability of his interlocutor to grasp this idea of the self-identical citizen that is a holder of rights regardless of his or her belief, or lack thereof, in God. In using this example, Mina is not simply demanding the rights for his own community of faith, Evangelicals or more broadly Christians in Egypt. Rather, he is making an assertion that marks his own political ideology as decidedly modern. The issue at stake for Mina is not pragmatic – whether or not the freedoms of Christians in Egypt will be protected under the law – but rather an ideological insistence that the state treat its subjects as citizens, conceived in terms of a secular-liberal politic.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have told a story about how historical contingencies, contemporary politics, class position, and religious commitment and power structures have converged at this moment at KDEC to produce the desire for both a modern citizen and a modern political state. I have argued that this struggle for and against the modernity narrative has been an integral part of the Evangelical Egyptian church since its inception. The desire for modernity shapes not only the ways that KDEC structures its meetings, services, and service projects but it also defines the kinds of political aspirations of KDEC leaders and youth hold and the ways they imagine their own citizenship in the nation of Egypt. Most importantly, however, at KDEC the site for the cultivation and socialization of this ideal citizen is the church.

The church, as the site for creating the good citizen who will then engage in the sphere of secular-liberal politics, carries its own latent contradictions. In fact, nowhere is this broad orientation toward secular-liberal political imaginaries more pervasive, or more problematic, at KDEC in this moment than in terms of how political secularization is or is not practiced by the Egyptian state. The discursive space of secularism is where I turn in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: DEBATING SECULARISM

INTRODUCTION: DAVID THE REVOLUTIONARY

The main sanctuary, snack shop, front courtyard, and *Bait al-Salah* room are the predominant sites of the church for congregants to meet, talk, and drink tea or coffee together before and after services or prayer meetings. The church building itself, however, ascends four floors up. A winding staircase in the back entrance of the building leads to narrow a series of hallways containing the offices and meeting rooms of the fairly large pastoral staff. On an afternoon in early November, 2011, I sat in the middle of one of those hallways on a simple black couch waiting for one of the church leaders and members of the Political Activism Committee. A small group of people loitered in the same hallway, carrying flowers and dressed in formal attire apparently waiting for a wedding or a baptism, their voices low and solemn. After some time, David came up the steps and greeted me with his wide smile and firm handshake. I had met David a number of times at prayer meetings, protest events, and in the company of mutual friends. He is obviously socially adept and comfortable with interviews. Others have told me that he is the church leader who is entrusted with and passionate about media coverage of KDEC events. Indeed, in our conversations, he often spoke to me of the media outlets that have covered the church in the past year and his role in organizing that coverage. He leads me back through the hallway to a corner office that he shares with another staff member. There are two windows, one of which beams sunshine down on the faded green carpet, while the other opens directly into the construction of a new

addition KDEC has been building for its expanding youth ministry. David leans back in his office chair with his arms behind his head, emanating confidence.

In his mid-40s, David has been a part of KDEC since 1981, before the massive congregational influx (due, I am told, to the increased accessibility brought by the opening of the Cairo metro lines in 1989) that made it a widely recognized church in Evangelical circles in Egypt and the Middle East more broadly. As a member of the Political Activism Committee, David was tasked with raising awareness of political issues, providing practical help for congregants who wanted to join political parties or get registered for voting. He also served as the main media representative of the church. But his characterization of the political enthusiasm of the KDEC congregation is anything but optimistic.

Two days after the revolution people got bored of the political and reverted back to their original fear and insecurity. They said let's leave the political for the political people. We have a lot at the church who are, what we call 'super spiritual' (using a high pitched mocking voice, indicating facetiousness). These are most people [at the church].

All the youth and leaders who expressed some affinity with the protests and some interest in the political and revolutionary processes happening in Egypt replicated this same reading of the congregation at large of KDEC. The majority of the people were not interested in politics, saw it to have no place in a devoutly religious life, and felt deep ambivalence toward the processes that were shaking the Egyptian state and economy. David saw this hesitancy as so prevalent because of the Christian doctrine that submission to authorities is a moral requirement. In fact he saw this Christian doctrine as having ironic sympathizers: "They are just like the Salafis. God chooses authority and if you rebel against authority you rebel against God...[Political engagement] is very new."

Choosing to compare this doctrinal stance with the ultra-conservative Muslim Salafi sect, whose political party's (al-Nour Party) success in the 2011 parliamentary elections fundamentally shook the confidence that many Christians had had in the democratic process, is a strong assertion of David's disapproval of this kind of conservatism.³² I asked him what he thought it was that made him disregard this long-standing tradition of the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox and Evangelical churches. He again leaned back in his chair and smiled up at the ceiling. "I ask myself that question every day! Revolutionist is our character. We like to do the [new things]."

This conversation with David recalls several fundamental tensions that I heard expressed over and over at KDEC from the pulpit, in prayers, in conversations, and interviews. This theme is two-fold. First, there is a reticence on the part of the devoutly religious to engage in politics – that is, a sense that it is an inappropriate use of one's energy. Second, there is a sense among the younger generations and among the older staff of KDEC that this dichotomy between the religious life and the political life cannot be sustained by the Egyptian church in the face of the Egyptian uprising of 2011. In this chapter I use the stories of a number of younger and older congregants of KDEC to illuminate a discursive space in which conversations over political commitment, revolutionary sympathy, and good citizenship are taking place: secularism. I briefly trace the inter-disciplinary scholarly conversation that has arisen in the academy in the last 20

³² The word *salafi*, translated in English "companion," refers to people in the first generation of Muslims who lived at the time of the prophet Muhammad. The contemporary *Salafis* (I discuss them in more detail in chapter 3) in Egypt prior to 2011 were viewed only as anachronistic and pietistic communities of people who wanted to return to early Islamic practice. As I argued previously they have become in the discourses at KDEC the cultural and political "repugnant other" in relation to which Evangelicals constitute their own identities.

years over secularism, its teleology and its historical appearance. Ultimately, for the purposes of my project I approach the work of Talal Asad (2003), Jose Casanova (1994), and Hussein Ali Agrama (2010) and examine their focus on the performative power of the ideology of secularism. I argue that the commitment of these congregants of KDEC to the ideology of secularism arises from their position as a religious minority within a religious minority, their modernist desires, and their readings of certain sacred texts. The problem space of secularism that arises from these three impetuses, I argue, constrains and constitutes the political and revolutionary engagement of KDEC leaders and youth.

SECULARISM: BETWEEN HISTORY AND TELEOLOGY

I argue in chapter 2 that the congregants of KDEC see their faith community as a training ground for not just certain kinds of religious beliefs and practices but also as a way of becoming modern subjects and citizens. I see this modern subject making as a dual process of explicit aspiration and theological training. In this chapter I would like to focus on what has become one of the most salient characteristics of the modernity project: secularism. There has been growing consensus amongst scholars that the classic modernity narrative that has undergirded much anthropological, historical, and political academic writing has come under increased scrutiny in recent years and one of the main sites of contestation has been the secularization thesis (see Cannell 2010). Cannell suggests that this shift in the academy from a teleological to a historical reading of the secularization thesis is due, in part, to “the resurgence of so-called political religion in the 1980s” (2010:87).

Talal Asad has led the project of historicizing and de-naturalizing the concept of the secular in anthropology. In his groundbreaking work, *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), he presents a Foucauldian genealogical inquiry into the birth of the category of religion, interrogating what was the widely accepted and deeply influential work of Clifford Geertz. In chapter 2, I have given an extended summary of Asad's basic critiques of Geertz. I only re-iterate the important theme for the purposes of this chapter: the making of a trans-historical and trans-cultural essence called religion. As Charles Hirschkind and David Scott understand Asad's basic intellectual project,

The various traditions that anthropologists call religions cannot be understood as cultural elaborations of a universal form of experience, a *sui generis* category of human knowledge, but must be analyzed in their particularity, as the products of specific practices of discipline, authority, and power. (2006:7)

The ethnographic work of scholars like Ruth Marshall (2009), Saba Mahmood (2005) and Susan Harding (1991) has enhanced this Asadian critique of the inevitable teleology of the secularization story. Pentecostals in Nigeria, devout Muslim women of the Piety movement in Egypt, politically and socially conservative Christian fundamentalists of twentieth century U.S.A. – are all communities that in some ways very active, and in others more subtle ways challenge the secularization thesis, by blurring the line between politics and religion. This is strikingly not the case at KDEC. All of the congregants that I spoke with were firmly committed to this teleological reading of the secularization story. It is this commitment, among others, that make the community at KDEC (in this regard a typical Egyptian Evangelical church) so interesting. In public discourses and political structures and norms in Egypt at the moment of this ethnography debates over this very contestation are raging. Secular-liberal democracy, Islamist politics, *Sha'ria*

law, and civil society are widely debated terms in the conversations and events that were shaping the landscape of the Egyptian nation-state in 2011 and 2012. Moreover, it is within the context of this debate that KDEC members as a religious minority (Evangelical Egyptians in a the land of Coptic Orthodox Christianity) in a religious minority (Coptic Christians in a majority Muslim community) negotiate their own commitment to both the political ideology of secularism and their self-described prophetic role in revolutionary Egypt.

Part of the particular salience and intractability of the academic conversation about the secularization thesis is due to the two levels at which it is argued and understood: the normative (teleological) and the analytical (historical). There is the thesis that modernity as a historical force inevitably leads to the secularization of society such that religion is removed from the sphere of politics, and becomes a matter of private opinion and conscience.³³ The second, taken by Asad and others, takes secularization to be an ideology whose features are similar to those of what it is thought to oppose (religion); thereby, secularism becomes not an inevitable telos of modern history but rather a project that people *enact* upon the world. As Cannell suggests in an annual review of the anthropology of secularism,

Like other powerful ideas, however, it has many centrally important material effects, as when it is politically institutionalized and becomes programmatic... That is to say, its effects –like the effects of some religious faiths –vary according to how far people believe in it and in which ways. (2010:86).

³³ See Bruce (1996) for a prominent proponent of this theory of secularization.

Part of the difficulty and sometimes circularity of the argumentation around the secularization thesis revolves around these two nodes of speaking and writing about secularization. In much theorization of the secularization thesis there is a certain convergence of these two conceptions such that a “collapsing of the normative with the analytic” occurs (Agrama 2010:500).

These ideas have been debated inter-disciplinarily, as well. Philosopher Charles Taylor (2002; 2007) and political theorist William Connolly (1999) have figured centrally in the debate but both generally probe the thesis of secularization as a normative question: Is secularization a good to be sought or an illusion to be unmasked? Their discussion is fruitful and has spurred conversations with important consequences, in particular, in the global north. But more importantly for my purposes is the literature that has come out of anthropology by Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and Charles Hirschkind that seeks not necessarily to ask the normative question but to investigate the historical contingencies that have given rise to the social scientific category of “the religious” and, thereby, its other “the secular.” Agrama describes this new orientation thus:

These newer approaches have thus effected a separation between secularism’s normative standards and the analytic categories used to understand them, in an effort to trace the processes of power by which these normative standards were fashioned. (2010:499)

This mapping of the normative project of secularization as opposed to the analytic task of locating the historic contingencies that allowed for such an ideology to occur is helpful for conceptualizing where I hope to intervene in this project. As is clear from my fieldwork at KDEC, the normative project of secularization is a kind of hegemonic

ideology within the church community. Even those congregants who gestured toward their own ambiguities or difficulties with the concept of secularism still took the assumed desire for secularism in politics to be the benchmark against which they asked those questions.³⁴ My own interest in this chapter, however, is not to answer the normative question of whether secularism is or is not a universal good but rather to understand how these discourses at KDEC navigate the tensions inherent in conceptualizing and practicing secularism in Egypt in 2011.

Agrama has claimed that it is not the simple separation of politics and religion that defines the modern project of liberal secularism but rather a dialectical process of defining both ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ that is necessarily indeterminate and that relies on both cultivating and resolving questions of what is or is not political or religious.

My argument is that the processes by which secular doctrine is implemented incessantly generate the very question that doctrine aims to answer, namely, where to draw a line between religion and politics. That is, the very processes by which that line is drawn work to unsettle that very line. And thus, what best characterizes secularism is not a separation between religion and politics, but an *ongoing, deepening, entanglement in the **question** of religion and politics, for the purpose of identifying and securing fundamental liberal rights and freedoms.* (2010:502; emphasis in original)

I quote Agrama at such length because I think that the framing that Agrama uses for understanding secularism opens up the very problem spaces that occur in everyday conversation, theological arguments, and institutionalized discourse at KDEC. At KDEC one can see the active and discursive negotiation of religion and politics. I argue that this impulse to separate the political from the religious is perhaps the most important

³⁴ Even if, as I describe in chapter 2, they complicate and localize this teleology in their reading of their own *prophetic* role in revolutionary Egypt.

constitute constraint for how youth and leaders at KDEC have chosen to navigate this tumultuous period in Egyptian history.

Agrama's site of investigation is the Egyptian legal system, especially how *Shari'a* law and liberal law codes converge and diverge to create the personal status laws. Therefore, Agrama's main interest is in demonstrating the way that secularism as a political ideology serves to consolidate state sovereignty by allowing the state to adjudicate and decide the boundaries of both religion and politics. For the purposes of this study, however, I am interested in the everyday discourses that are circulated at KDEC about secularism and, in particular, the "drawing of the line" between religion and politics. This is to say that whereas Agrama is interested in how secularism as a political and juridical ideology extends state power, I am interested in how the discourse of secularism as an ideology for living constitutes the problem space out of which KDEC leaders and youth engaged the political, revolutionary, and counter-revolutionary challenges of 2011.

While I find Agrama's definition of secularism as an "ongoing, deepening, entanglement in the question of religion and politics" (2010:502) to be useful for conceptualizing my intervention, I find analytic clarity in the three-fold distinction of Jose Casanova in his work *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994). He aims to disambiguate the many meanings that are attached to the theory of secularization. For Casanova there are three distinct statements that scholars use to define the process of secularization. The first is that secularization is the process of *differentiating* the religious from the secular, be this in the form of institutions, norms, or logics. The second is that secularization can be seen as a *decline* in the religious sphere as such. The

third is the contention that secularization involves the *removal* of religion out of the “public” into the “private” sphere. Casanova finds the process of distinguishing and evaluating these essentially different assertions fruitful in the service of finding the “defensible core of the theory of secularization” (cited in Scott and Hirschkind 2006:13). Although Talal Asad (in Asad 2003) has given his own critical reading of Casanova’s salvaging of the theory of secularization, for the purposes of this project I find it useful to employ Casanova’s three part distinction as a grid for categorizing how secularism is articulated, defended, and questioned at KDEC. In the next section, using focus groups, interviews, and sermons in order to tease out the work that a concept like secularism does in shaping the kinds of political imaginaries and sympathies at KDEC.

NEGOTIATIONS AT KDEC

All of my interlocutors articulated a strong commitment to the first and third of Casanova’s three assertions. It is commonly held knowledge at KDEC that in order for Egypt to achieve its full national potential it needs to actively separate the religious sphere from the secular sphere and marginalize the influence of religion on the public sphere –politics, economy, education, and the like. But as I showed in chapter 2, the congregants at KDEC see real change and improvement coming to Egypt *only* through spiritual transformation and these spiritual transformations have to be led by the church.³⁵

³⁵ At KDEC “the Church” means the entirety of those people in the world who have a “genuine faith” in Jesus Christ for salvation. Who is decided to fall into this category depends on to whom the question is posed but “the Church” is not limited to the congregation at KDEC, nor for most Egyptian Evangelicals is it limited to Protestant Christianity. The transformations, if they are to end in the good of the nation, however, must be driven by the prayer and faithfulness of this group of genuine Christian believers.

The difficulty of reconciling this kind of vision of political and social change was evident in church discourses, sermons, and interviews. The congregants with whom I spoke readily conceded that this commitment to marginalization of religion in the public square and KDEC's calling to be "the Church in the Square," at the forefront of the revolution (albeit in the terms set forth in chapter 2), left them in a paradoxical situation.

In regard to Casanova's first assertion, the idea that religion is an essentially different sphere of reality from the political is a deep framing narrative at KDEC. On the one hand, this framing was communicated to me most forcefully when congregants told me that people at KDEC, like most people in Egypt, were very familiar with the sphere of religion but were unfamiliar with the 'political' sphere, which is built on dishonesty, irrelevant to people's lives, and hopelessly confusing. Like David, who decried congregational apathy in the opening vignette of this chapter, the young men and leaders that I spoke with considered themselves exceptions to this rule. They had, by long study and attention to events, learned how to function in and understand the political. It was assumed, however, that most people in the church were not "gifted" for the political. It was a particular calling and, more to the point, a particularly rare calling. At KDEC this assumption is so deeply embedded and foundational for any sermon, interview, or conversation I witnessed that it functioned merely as a reflection of how things are, not requiring any kind of justification. On the other hand, the idea that religious motivations, logics or institutions should not encroach on the public domain, though widely and deeply representative of KDEC congregants, took on an even more normative character. This is, of course, not surprising given the historical context of law and state sovereignty in Egypt and, especially the striking electoral success of Islamist political groups

associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis. In large part, due to this background, Evangelical Egyptians saw Casanova's third definition of secularization as a desirable political goal for Egypt.

I had become interested in KDEC originally because of the widespread sentiment in other evangelical Christian circles³⁶ that KDEC was particularly empathetic to the demands of the revolution and particularly active in Tahrir Square when other religious institutions – from al-Azhar University to Patriarch Shenouda of the Coptic Orthodox Church, to local church leaders at various Protestant churches – seemed wary of the movement and willing to back the Mubarak regime and, later, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces. Even in the early days of my fieldwork as I explained my project to congregants at KDEC I was met with equal parts approval for giving attention to KDEC's revolutionary sympathies and anxiety about possibly encouraging the blending of religion and politics.³⁷ This dialogic relationship between a commitment to the political ideology of secularism and the desire for the church to be a place for mobilizing and training certain types of political actors is the problem space in which KDEC youth and leaders seem to negotiate their own political commitments.

These are the terms of the discourses at KDEC surrounding secularism as a political value, and as a reflection of the rightful place of religion in the public sphere. In

³⁶ Both evangelical expatriate churches and among Evangelical Egyptian acquaintances.

³⁷ It has been my impression that this anxiety was partly strategic by making political assertions, interlocutors might be subject to state scrutiny and partly moral, an idea that the church and religious authorities should stay out of political processes and the forming of political commitments by congregants.

the final section of this chapter I illustrate some of the instances in which KDEC leaders explicitly spoke in support of secularism.

SECULARISM FROM THE PULPIT

Pastor Sameh, given his own increasingly strong support of the revolutionary youth activists, often had to iterate the strong commitment of KDEC to the principle of political secularism. Previous to the first parliamentary elections, the Political Activism Committee had helped church members get registered to vote, and given a variety of workshops on how the elections and voting would proceed. One of the head elders of the church had even, from the front stage at a Friday morning service (the main service of the week), given a lecture to the congregation replete with dry erase board, graphs, and probabilities of certain parties winning. Shortly thereafter unofficial results showed overwhelming victory of the political parties of the Muslim Brotherhood (The Freedom and Justice Party) and the conservative Salafis (al-Nour Party). In his sermons after what was for the entire community a frightening electoral event, Pastor Sameh seemed even more insistent on communicating the appropriate role of religion, especially of the Christian Evangelical Church, in politics.

The church is not a political party and will never be a political party. The church has nothing to do with politics. When we talk about these things [freedom of religion, justice, equality] we are talking about human values, not political values...In the political arena they do political things but here in the church we are about life values.

Pastor Sameh's language in this particular sermon is more forceful and blatant than I had heard previously in the year. It had, often, seemed to me that he struggled to articulate how it was that the church might insert itself into Tahrir Square and how it

might express its own political demands (for freedom of expression and freedom of religion in particular) without contravening a strong revulsion to speak ‘politics’ from the pulpit. In the light of the collective sense of trauma at KDEC following the great Islamist victory in the parliamentary elections seemed to be clarifying lines that had been blurring. In contrast, in this language he sharpened those lines.

In the same sermon, Pastor Sameh walked to the front of the stage, leaned over the edge, and looking directly into the first row of congregants said firmly and slowly, “We have nothing to do with elections as the church. We submit to parliament.” This very simplistic statement coming after Pastor Sameh’s usual rhetorical creativity, and after the months of preparation done at the church to ensure that people from the church knew how, where, and why to vote marks a moment of rupture in which the leadership of KDEC re-adjusted its engagement with what Sameh calls the “political.” The volatility and uncertainty of the transition period in Egypt is made visible in this discursive turn away from the ‘political’ by a leader who had championed the importance of KDEC playing the role of “the Church in the Square.”

This moment into which Pastor Sameh intervened was one of palpable anxiety in which almost all the Evangelicals that I spoke with indicated a heightened sense of precarity. Perhaps this pull back from his more bold engagements with the political sphere was a function of their fear. But the subtext to Pastor Sameh’s sermon was the prevalent sentiment among Evangelical Egyptians that the MB and al-Nour Party had manipulated religious sentiments in some Muslim neighborhoods in order to garner more votes. Pastor Sameh obliquely referenced this frustration, saying, “I want to say congratulations to those who won the elections but without cheating. The end doesn’t

justify the means...some people think that they have to cheat to win.” This background gives even more texture to the anxiety that Pastor Sameh gave in this sermon over the “appropriate” role of religion in politics. The place for this faith-based institution in the Egyptian political sphere is not only shaped by the particular commitments of KDEC as the “Church in the Square” but is also inflected and influenced by the way that other religiously-committed organizations navigated the political processes of 2011. These processes were largely contingent and emergent but they were also, I would argue, built upon a particular habitus shaped by the historical, contemporary and ideological influences that I set out in the beginning of this chapter. How is this habitus, this “matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” that structure the engagements of committed congregants of KDEC being negotiated and improvised upon by the committed youth of KDEC (Bourdieu 1977:72)?

NEGOTIATIONS OF SECULARISM AMONG YOUTH AT KDEC

A month before this sermon by Pastor Sameh, I facilitated a focus group with four KDEC youth, all of whom had been suggested by a church small group leader³⁸. Each of these youth had been at the church for at least 10 years, three of them were born and raised in the church and had relatives in the administrative or pastoral ranks of the church. Every one of them came to the church building four days a week from Heliopolis, a well-to-do suburb of Cairo about an hour drive from downtown and KDEC, and were involved in both *Bait al-Salah* and a small mentoring group. I was surprised to learn, once we began the conversation, that none of them was a self-professed political

³⁸ This focus group session took place on November 2, one month prior to the parliamentary elections, as the last month preparatory rush at the church for the upcoming elections began.

activist. The three men had been to Tahrir Square a couple of times during the 18 days in Tahrir but only at the end and, as I understood, only to see what was going on there. Even given their very religiously committed life-styles, and very evangelical (and evangelistic) faith, they could articulate very strongly the sense that exclusivist religious claims made for difficult public religion. An excerpt from our conversation perhaps will illustrate this anxiety:

Maged: I agree with Michael that our culture forced us to think in the same way with the religion and politics issues. But, I think we have to learn how to separate them. I don't know how but...(2 second pause)

Anna: What makes it difficult to separate them? Is it just your culture? Or is it just that Egyptian culture...

Maged: The culture and everyone just thinks that he is on the right way so everyone has to follow that...So, I am a Christian. So, I think that I am in the right way so I just try to follow what my religion tells me to do and the Muslims well think in this same way...So...

Maged's words, verbal pauses and open-ended answers indicate his own discomfort with the exclusivist claims that he holds as a member of KDEC and the similarity that those religious commitments have with the Salafis. Nevertheless, whereas Maged's assertions were halting and unsure, the only woman in the group articulated something just like this point in such a blunt manner that the other participants eagerly corrected what they saw as religious hypocrisy. In response to my question about how one's religious commitments should be given expression in a public arena like political discourse she said,

I always think that it is good for me as a Christian to involve politics in religion but not for others. Because in a way I think that if I follow the Christian...If I follow Christ in being a good person then I am going to make the world better.

The other participants were quick to point out what they saw as a blatantly hypocritical double standard. The difficulty of a church like KDEC being a site of mobilization, teaching, and training, for their very own political commitments, however, seemed to make it difficult for any of the others to challenge this double standard, which was so troubling to them coming from Salafis. Finally, Michael, a soft-spoken 23-year-old from an upper-middle class family with a slight lisp and gentle demeanor suggested another framework for disarming this incoherence:

I mean the religion's role is just to understand [integrity] –being faithful, being loyal, being honest. These are the stuff that no religion in the world would disagree on. This is a common base around... You would be involving ethics but you're not saying follow this or this and don't follow this or this.

In this articulation, the ethical requirements of religion get evacuated from “the religious” and become appropriate in the public square because they are properly universal. This is a very similar understanding to the one that Pastor Sameh sets out between “political values” and “life values.” It seems, however, that whereas both of these categories (i.e. “life values” and “ethics”) are cast as a universal and do not, therefore, require justification from public political debate, Pastor Sameh (in fact, almost all the preachers I have heard speak from the pulpit) sees the church as a crucial and uniquely effective communicator of this message of freedom, justice, and equality. At face value, nevertheless, Michael's understanding of the role of faith commitments in public discourse leaves no space for a unique prophetic role for the church. In fact, it precludes *a priori* any unique teaching or impetus for Christianity.

Michael's intervention is even more noteworthy given that Evangelicals are known for their strong proselytization impulse and a particularist and exclusivist

approach to religious truth claims. In this particular focus group, though, the young men and woman indicated that it is this very exclusiveness of religious claims that makes religion not amenable to politics and public debate. There is a great deal more to be said about how exclusivist religious claims engage in political discourse. In this extended sketch of a focus group among religiously committed youth at KDEC with revolutionary sympathies I want merely to highlight the need to *explain* the fact that their motivation toward political goals (like justice, equality, and freedom) are rooted in their socialization into and commitment to a particular *religious* tradition. Moreover, I want to highlight that this need to explain – that is, to negotiate – the intervention of religious commitments into the political mark these youth as not *so* different from their quintessentially “pre-modern Other: the Salafis.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I recall Agrama’s assertion that it is a *necessary* part of the active practice of secularism to draw and re-draw the line between religion and politics. Agrama is interested in how this process consolidates and extends state sovereign power, but even in its more discursive forms, like those that I have been investigating in this chapter, secularism seems fundamentally to function as a discourse that settles and re-settles the lines of religion and politics. Nevertheless, as Agrama poignantly states

The answers to [the question of where to draw a line between religion and politics] are thus thought to be of utmost consequence for how ways of life can be lived and fundamental freedoms are identified. And so it is a question always infused with affects, sensibilities, and anxieties that mobilize and are mobilized by power. (2010:500)

Michael was happy to separate “ethics,” – the proper way of living in the world with others – from the main cause and essence of religion. This idiosyncratic line drawing enabled him to maintain both his commitment to secular-liberal politics and devout religiosity. In contrast, Pastor Sameh can make no such arrangement as a believer in a unique *prophetic* and *active* role for KDEC in particular, and the Evangelical churches at large, in revolutionary Egypt. While these questions of secularism, politics, and religion are anything but settled, they are the ground out of which KDEC members are negotiating their place in a country that seems to them to be moving towards excluding them (in terms of rights and freedoms) for their religious commitments.

Therefore, for Evangelical Christians in Egypt, the stakes in the question of secularism are neither “simply technical or merely academic ones.” There is a great deal of anxiety in this church community over what congregants may lose in terms of their “fundamental rights and freedoms” depending on how the question of secularism is decided in Egypt (Agrama 2010:500). As I have argued throughout this thesis, however, the projects of KDEC are not simply projects of survival. KDEC leaders are not looking simply to secure their basic rights, but rather are actively contesting and negotiating a *place-in-the-world*. At KDEC this place is thought to be prophetic; as leaders at KDEC iterate frequently, the church is to be the “conscience of society.’ But, this commitment to a public place and role in Egypt often, as can be seen in the conversations and sermons that I have included here, fits uncomfortably within the framework of secularism.

The question of secularism, especially when it is applied to the Middle East and the majority Muslim countries therein, is particularly inflected by a concern for the well-being and protection of Christian and Jewish minorities. Egypt, in this conversation, is a particularly important space given that it is home to the largest Christian community in the Middle East. The Coptic Orthodox establishment has, therefore, a history of negotiations with these questions of state power, public religions, and religious minoritarianism that provide the broader socio-political context in which Evangelical Egyptians negotiate their own engagement with Egyptian politics and state apparatus.

CHAPTER 5: BLESSED BE EGYPT MY PEOPLE

On the twelfth of March 1976, on the banks below the Virgin Mary Church in the Cairene suburb of Maadi in Cairo a waterlogged Bible washed ashore opened to a page in the book of Isaiah, chapter 19 that announces, “Blessed be Egypt my people.” This water-stained bible now sits behind a glass case on display in that church. This widely beloved miracle story was often told to me as an indication of God’s special favor toward and presence among the Christian communities of Egypt. I have argued that the political imaginary of youth and leaders at KDEC is widely shaped by their particular adoption of secular-liberal ideology influenced by their roots in the Anglo-American missionary endeavor and their status as a religious minority in a predominantly Muslim country, as well as by their theologically evangelical stance that emphasizes the efficacy of prayer, fasting, and piety to bring about material change in the world. Although its evangelical and elite socio-economic statuses are salient for shaping the political imaginaries of congregants at KDEC this church also, like many Christian communities in Egypt, see their Christian-ness as an integral part of their national belonging and rootedness in Egypt. And this narrative of Egyptian Christian-ness has important implications for KDEC youth and leader’s negotiations of citizenship and national belonging, as well as how they see themselves interacting with the Egyptian state.

INTRODUCTION: “CHRISTIANS IN EGYPT”

As I noted at the beginning of this thesis, some of the most ubiquitous slogans of the January 2011 protests that toppled Hosni Mubarak from the presidency were those about unity (“joined hands”) of both the military and the people (*al-sha’b wa al-gaish*) and of Christians and Muslims (*al-messihīyyīn wa-l-muslimīn*), rhetoric, as I noted earlier, that was embodied in human shields and shared prayers between Muslims and Christians.³⁹ As Anthony Shenoda (2011) noted, however, what was being labeled in some media sources as a “Coptic mass” was actually a Protestant prayer by a KDEC leader. The difference in sensibility, content, and terminology of this Protestant prayer from “the Coptic Orthodox liturgy which the vast majority of church-going Christians in Egypt typically pray” is strikingly obvious to anyone familiar with the prayer and liturgy of the Coptic Orthodox Church (Shenoda 2011). The mediatized confusion is not doubt part of a general acknowledgement that the vast majority of Muslim Egyptians (or other non-Coptic Orthodox viewers) knows very little about the ritual or religious life of Coptic Christians and would therefore not recognize the Protestant-ness of this event (Shenoda 2010). Certainly the confusion evidenced in this reporting is due in part to this ignorance. In an important sense, however, the specific kind of Christian leading these prayers was irrelevant to the symbolic role that this event, and events like it, played within the larger narrative of Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt in 2011. The striking cultural, theological, and institutional differences between these Evangelical Egyptians (especially the upper-class charismatic-leaning Evangelicals of KDEC) and their Coptic Orthodox

³⁹ The images of Muslims creating “human shields” around Coptic places of worship after the Alexandria Church Bombing earlier in January had gained wide popularity on social media sites and in newspaper coverage in the aftermath of the massacre, which is perhaps in part why just a month later in the 18 day protests the language of inter-religious solidarity was so poignant and prevalent.

compatriots was occluded in this story of the unity between Christian and Muslim Egyptians “united as one hand” to depose an autocratic ruler.

This chapter tells a story of the way that historical contingencies, revolutionary action, and media coverage have contributed to the now-fracturing, now-homogenizing category of ‘Christians in Egypt’ and how these processes have shaped the institutionalized discourses, affective engagement, and narratives of identity and national belonging that have circulated in and out of KDEC in 2011. There is a common sentiment at KDEC that one of the most important results of the 18 days in Tahrir Square in January 2011 was an increased inter- and intra-religious unity, between Christians and Muslims but also between Christians of different denominations. Discourses of unity pervaded the aftermath of the Alexandria Church Bombing, the 18 days in Tahrir and the many protests and incidents of sectarian violence in 2011, both at KDEC and in the wider Egyptian public sphere. As a corollary to these discourses of unity, the most traumatic events for the activists, worshippers, and leaders at KDEC were those events that seemed to endanger or invalidate this religious unity.

THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

I have been told by some of my interlocutors that every Egyptian is a “Copt” (*qibti* in Arabic) because the word is an Arabic transliteration of the Greek word “aigyptoi,” which simply designated the inhabitants of the ancient land of Egypt. At the time of the Islamic conquest of Egypt in 641, the term came to be a delineate the native Christian inhabitants of the land from the newly arrived Arab Muslims. The conversion of the Egyptian population to Islam was a gradual process but “[b]y the end of the ninth

century, the Christians had ceased to be a majority, and the decline in the proportion of Copts in the population continued in subsequent centuries” (Pennington 1982:158). During this time the word ‘Copt’ became a religious designation for a Christian Egyptian of whatever descent. In general, though, the “term ‘Copt’ is relatively elastic as used in historical, ethnic, religious, cultural, and social contexts” (Gabra 2009:1) which means that in common Egyptian usage “the term ‘Coptic’ is also used to designate Christian minorities in Egypt who are members of the Roman Catholic Church and of various evangelical denominations to signal their ethnic identity as Egyptians” (Gabra 2009:1).

The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the longest-standing Christian institutions in the world and the largest Christian community in the whole of the Middle East. Tradition holds that the preaching of St. Mark, a young companion of Jesus, traveling companion of St. Paul and the author of the canonical gospel that bears his name, converted the earliest Egyptians. St. Mark is said to have been the first Christian martyr in Egypt. By the beginning of the fifth century A.D. Christians accounted for some eighty percent of the population of Egypt (Gabra 2009:3). An early Coptic Patriarch, Alexander, was one of the foremost religious leaders who presided over the Council of Nicea in 325, a landmark event in early Christianity, which established the equality of substance between Christ and the Father. Some of the most important church leaders and theologians of the early Christian communities were part of this vibrant religious community in Alexandria: Clement, Origen, and Athanasius. The desert around Alexandria is also held to be the birthplace of Christian monasticism, a movement of pious men and women committed to isolated ascetic living away from urban and rural centers (Harmless 2004). At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the patriarch of

Alexandria split ways with the Byzantine churches over the nature of Christ, adhering to a doctrine of the unified nature of Christ, as opposed to the Chalcedonian formulation, which posited the dual nature of Christ. This schism, while resulting in both bloodshed and increased rivalry between the Byzantine and Alexandrian hierarchies, established the theological and institutional independence of the Egyptian Orthodox church (Gabra 2009:3). In 639 the Arab occupation of Egypt began and within two years the Muslim conquerors had control of the entire country. By the mid-ninth or early tenth century the majority of the population of Egypt had ceased to be Christian, and the current consensus among scholars is that Coptic Egyptians make up around ten percent of Egypt's population (Shenoda 2011).

This very short and selective sketch serves to underscore some important characteristics about the Coptic Orthodox Church and its position vis-à-vis Egypt as a territory and world Christianity. First of all, the Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian institutions in the world and played an important early role in the formation of Christian theology, literature, and monasticism. There is a great deal of pride in the Coptic Orthodox Church about these venerable beginnings, which are often cast as both giving the church a primacy in terms of Egyptian-ness as well as Christian-ness.⁴⁰ Second of all, the Coptic Orthodox Church has maintained a stridently

⁴⁰ This sense of indigeneity, and the very different political context in which Egyptian Christians now live in a majority-Muslim modern nation-state was illustrated quite dramatically in September 2010, when a Bishop Bishoy, one of the most influential bishops of the Coptic Orthodox establishment, was quoted in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm* as saying, among other things, that “Muslims are only guests” in Egypt. Pope Shenoda and Bishop Bishoy both made public apologies for the statement which came in the midst of significant sectarian tensions surrounding the wife of a Coptic priest, who allegedly converted to Islam but had been returned to the Coptic Orthodox church and was being held at a monastery (Associated Press 2010). Although not always so public, the sentiment remains common among Coptic Orthodox

independent stance vis-à-vis other Christian establishments, notably the Roman Catholic Church, which has repeatedly sent envoys to convince the Coptic Orthodox hierarchy to come under the auspices of the Roman Catholic papacy (Gabra 2009:9). This staunch religious independence of the Coptic Orthodox establishment, however, is ironically juxtaposed with the story of its implication in and relation to the Egyptian state in the modern period.

REGULATED IMPROVISATION: THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE STATE

The story of how Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab nationalism and sweeping socialist reform was followed by Anwar Sadat's *intifah* neoliberal trade policies and utilization of Islamist groups to combat Nasserist policies is a familiar narrative by which recent events is decoded and historicized. But another story running contemporaneously with this story that has defined in many ways the political, economic, and social position of the largest Christian community in the Middle East: the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The predecessor of the late Pope Shenouda of the Coptic Orthodox Church was Kirolos VI, who led the church from 1959 to 1971. Widely seen as a pious and deeply spiritual monk, Kirolos was instrumental in beginning the development of a wide-network of social services by and for Coptic Christians while also expanding existing Coptic institutions like the Institution for Coptic Studies and the Sunday School Movement (Sedra 2012). This institutional expansion of services that ostensibly

Christians that they have a claim to indigeneity, a rootedness, in Egypt that other communities, Muslim or Evangelical, do not share.

connected the Coptic Church hierarchies with the everyday lives of Copts proceeded simultaneously alongside an ever closer relationship between Nasser and Pope Kirollos, as “the Copts’ sole legitimate representative” (Sedra 2012).⁴¹

This increasing reach of the Coptic Orthodox Church’s hierarchy into the public political arena culminated in the late Shenouda III’s papacy. Pope Shenouda expanded even further the role of the Sunday School Movement, already transformed by Pope Kirollos, and was instrumental in reviving the Coptic monastic movement, renovating monasteries, and building up a network of diasporic Coptic Orthodox Churches. Perhaps what would become Shenouda III’s lasting legacy was foreshadowed in his first years in the papacy under President Anwar Sadat. As opposed to Kirollos’s close partnership with Nasser, Shenouda led “a restrained but determined” opposition to the increasing Islamization of public discourse under Sadat and his anti-Nasserite politics (Osman 2011:154). This opposition to the state regime eventually ended with Sadat’s deposing Pope Shenouda from the papacy and exiling him to Wadi el-Natrun until 1985, an exile that extended beyond Sadat’s assassination in 1981. Sadat’s successor Hosni Mubarak finally pardoned and re-instated him as the Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Upon his return Shenouda resumed the style of political relations that Kirollos before him had initiated with Nasser, including standing as the sole representative of the Coptic Christian community, staunchly and publicly supporting the Mubarak regime, and

⁴¹ One of the most important institutional steps in this direction was the dissolution of the *majlis al-milli*, a council “through which elite Copts had repeatedly sought to limit the control of the clergy over Church finances” (Sedra 2012; Vivian Ibrahim 2011). This move effectively cut off the educated and elite Coptic community from formal access to state representation, concentrating political power and representation not just in the Coptic Orthodox Church hierarchy, but in a very significant sense in the *person* of the Pope.

containing and mediating the grievances of the Coptic Church in Egypt as well as an increasingly vocal diasporic Coptic community (Sedra 2012). This often meant an overt refusal on the part of the Coptic Orthodox hierarchy and the Pope himself of any attempt at framing Coptic Egyptians as a minority. In a 1994 Human Rights Watch report, the Pope was quoted as saying, “We are not a minority in Egypt. We do not like to consider ourselves a minority and do not like others to call us a minority” (Human Rights Watch 1994: 5). The alliance became so close that when the January 25th protests began, the Orthodox Church hierarchy publicly stood behind Mubarak and against the protests. This position was met with hostility and frustration from many sectors of the Coptic Orthodox population, especially among youth activists.

This brief alternative historical narrative serves to indicate that questions of public religion, of church involvement with the state, and of religious minoritarianism have been the terms of a constitutive debate for the entire last half of the 20th century in the Coptic Orthodox Church. As I have argued previously, for many interlocutors at KDEC during the course of my field work, the Maspero massacre was *the* watershed moment in terms of individuals’ commitments to the anti-SCAF protests, the switch to much more problematic language about the state of the ‘revolution,’ and increasing anxiety about the rise of Islamist political parties. But the Maspero massacre was also an important turning point for the Coptic Orthodox Church and its historic position vis-à-vis the Egyptian state. In his reflection on the Maspero protests and the death of Pope Shenouda, Paul Sedra insists that the actions that led to this bloody event should not simply be read as a reaction to sectarian violence:

The Coptic protests at Maspero need to be understood not simply as a response to those who burn churches, or to government officials who approach violence against Copts in a cavalier manner. The protestors were sending a message not only to the Egyptian state and to Muslims, but to their Church leadership as well. To demonstrate in that way was an act of defiance against the Church, and specifically, against the Church hierarchy's partnership with an authoritarian state. (Sedra 2012)⁴²

As I read Sedra's intervention here, the Maspero moment was not simply another installment in a long genealogy of sectarianism and church burning in Egypt. It was a catalyst, or a marker, of an attempted re-inscription of the terms of the debate surrounding politics, public religion, minorities, and the alliance between religious and state authorities. Just as the Maspero protests and massacre served as a moment in rupture in the established relationship between the Coptic Orthodox Church hierarchy and the Egyptian state, the establishment over one hundred and fifty years earlier of a new Egyptian institution, the Evangelical Egyptian Church, served to fracture in a different manner the understanding of how to be Christian in Egypt.

A NEW KIND OF EGYPTIAN CHRISTIAN

The arrival of Anglo-American missionaries in the 19th century marked the beginning of a significant fracturing of the category "Christians in Egypt." The most influential of these missionaries were from the UPCNA (the United Presbyterian Church of North America), which established the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt to

⁴² This social contract between members and leaders had been fracturing already in the years leading up to 2011 in a series of small but vocal protests against the divorce laws of the Coptic Orthodox Church and then in September of 2011, in the widely publicized "resigning" of 120 Coptic Christians from the Orthodox establishment because of the strict personal status laws regarding divorce and remarriage (Ekram Ibrahim 2011)

which KDEC belongs. The UPCNA would go on to join with the New York Presbyterian Church to create one of the largest and most influential Protestant denomination in the U.S.A., the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA). Whereas the UPCNA missionaries that established the first Egyptian Presbyterian churches were marked by an ambiguously evangelical faith, the PCUSA nowadays is a quintessentially mainstream Protestant denomination.⁴³

In fact, this trend of a continuing *evangelical* character to Protestant churches established in the global south by what are now mainline Protestant denominations in the global north is a common one. In his contribution to the series of publications of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (IFEMT), Terrence Ranger says that

Within most of the global South's thriving mainline Protestant churches, evangelicalism is the dominant, driving element, which of course is what increasingly separates [global South] Protestants from fellow Anglicans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians in Europe and North America [...] Evangelical Methodists in Mozambique may have far more in common with evangelical Presbyterians in South Korea or with evangelical Pentecostals in Brazil than with fellow Methodists in Maine or Minnesota. (2008:x)

This seems to be the situation of the Evangelical Presbyterians in Egypt and their general relation to the denomination of the Anglo-American missionaries who originally brought this form of Protestantism to Egypt. Whereas the Presbyterian denomination that came

⁴³ I remind the reader that I am employing a widely-used distinction between “evangelical” communities that exhibit Bebbington’s quadrilateral of principles –crucicentrism, Biblicism, activism, and conversionism (1989:8) – and mainline Protestants who largely downplay all four of these evangelical impulses. Mainline Protestant denominations are known less for their proselytizing and more for “respectful witness” and inter-faith dialogue, more for their social service projects and less for their missionary activity.

from the UPCNA (that is, the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America) can no longer be identified as an *evangelical* denomination, the church that it left behind in Egypt is still very much so today. I am told that this is even more the case for KDEC because of its charismatic leanings and its international networking. In terms of training, international speakers, and funding, KDEC's closest partnerships are not with mainline PCUSA churches or with Coptic Orthodox Churches but with non-denominational evangelical organizations like the International House of Prayer.⁴⁴

This evangelical character of the Protestant churches of the Middle East in general is also widely acknowledged by the region's scholars and theologians. As indicated by a Lebanese pastor and member of the Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches, "In the Middle East, the word 'evangelical' (*injīlī* in Arabic) is used to designate the various Christian denominations commonly known in the rest of the world as 'Protestant'" (Badr 2000:60). During my fieldwork the terms "Evangelical," "Protestant," and "Presbyterian" were all used colloquially as synonyms.⁴⁵

As I have noted before, the evangelicalism of the Egyptian Presbyterian Church separates it theologically from their historical antecedents among the Presbyterian churches in the U.S.A. More importantly, however, it separates them socially, ritually, and theologically from their fellow Egyptian Copts. The services of KDEC are non-liturgical and programmatic in structure, basically revolving around corporate worship through singing praise choruses and a forty-five minute sermon. The music is up-beat,

⁴⁴ See chapter 1 for a more detailed argument of the "evangelical" character of KDEC.

⁴⁵ If and when I pushed my interlocutors for distinctions, however, most of them indicated that *technically* there were differences between these terms of designation.

soft-rock-influenced worship ballads that resemble in chord structure and lyrical content the praise and worship choruses of the nondenominational evangelical U.S. music worship scene. There is very little in a KDEC worship service, either in the “traditional” service that caters to the older generation of Evangelicals little influenced by the charismatic impulse of the *Bait al-Salah* movement, or in the youth services, that resembles anything like the Coptic Orthodox liturgy in the ancient Coptic language, replete with incense, golden censors, priestly robes, or icons. These ritual aspects of communal worship are radically disparate.

Mina, the college student I introduced in chapter 3, grew up in the Coptic Orthodox church, serving as an altar boy in his early adolescence. To the chagrin of his (not very devout) parents, he decided in his late teens to convert to Evangelicalism because he “didn’t see God in that church.” When I asked him how he knew whether God was in a church or not, he replied that *he* could not feel God’s presence in a church service conducted in a language he did not understand and that had such rigidly prescribed rituals of embodiment and speech. He bowed mockingly and recited in Coptic a fragment of the liturgy that he remembered in a monotone voice. Mina described spontaneity in worship, experiential feeling of the divine presence through individual contemplation and affection, and the importance of individual intellectual comprehension and commitment to the words one says and hears in the church. All of these characteristics index strikingly Protestant, in fact evangelical, religious sensibilities.

Given these widely divergent practices and sensibilities, as well as the colonial moment and alliances that the Anglo-American missions maintained, it is not surprising that since the inception of the Evangelical Egyptian church, tensions have simmered

between these two establishments. The original goal of the American Presbyterian missionaries was the conversion of Muslims, a task that proved too difficult for a variety of social, legal, and religious reasons.⁴⁶ Faced with their own failure at successfully converting Muslims, these missionaries turned to the much more receptive Coptic Orthodox population. This intra-religious proselytizing endeavor illustrates just how large was the cultural and religious divide between these Anglo-American Protestants and their Egyptian Orthodox co-religionists. The language that these U.S. American missionaries used to describe the Coptic Orthodox Church was enormously derogatory, referring to the institution as a ‘mummified’ body, devoid of life and vitality.⁴⁷ The highly ritualistic and hierarchical elements of Coptic Orthodox religiosity were viewed with a certain “oriental disdain” (Vivian Ibrahim 2011:28). As I argued in chapter 3, these Anglo-Americans missionaries, following broader colonial agendas, saw religious conversion not just as theological or creedal but also importantly socio-political, that is, a conversion to a “modern, progressive Christianity, one dedicated to the promotion of learning and

⁴⁶ See Sharkey 2005 and 2006 for a discussion of the efforts of American and British Protestant missionaries to evangelize among Muslim Egyptians and the ensuing political and social debates and upheaval. The other foreign mission establishments active at this time was the CMS, a British evangelical society that was more interested in working within the already existing Orthodox Church structure. Vivian Ibrahim says, “While many of the early CMS missionaries frowned upon the ancient rituals, dogmatic practices and customs of the Orthodox Coptic Church, viewing them with oriental disdain, the strengthening of the Church was necessary in order to achieve the longer term aim of converting Muslims” (2011:28). Both of these most influential Protestant missions saw the future prosperity of “Christians in Egypt” to be in improved education and the imputation of “modern” sensibilities and lifestyles. The Presbyterians contributed to this by establishing their own schools, while the CMS sought to bring modern reform to the existing Egyptian Christian institutions.

⁴⁷ Sharkey (2008) quotes Andrew Watson (one of the earliest Presbyterian missionaries to Egypt and father to the founder of the American University in Cairo, Charles R. Watson) as saying in 1897, “Christian in name, Christian in form, [the Coptic Church] was well typified by the mummified human body taken out of the tombs” (2008:19). Even in these negative iterations the Coptic Orthodox church’s continuity with the ancient Pharaonic Egypt is maintained.

technology, the propagation of democratic ideals, and the salvation of oppressed women” (Sharkey 2008:46).⁴⁸ What I have called simmering tension sometimes came to a dramatic head. For instance, in what has been called the Coptic persecution of Protestants, in 1867 in which schools at Asyut were closed, schoolbooks written by Presbyterians for their curriculum were publicly burned, and a newly opened seminary shut down (Vivian Ibrahim 2011:33).

In 1957 during the rise of Nasserite Arab nationalism, the Egyptian Evangelical church became for the first time institutionally and legally independent from the American UPCNA. The newly independent church adopted the label, “Coptic Evangelical Church in the Nile Valley,” adding the adjective “Coptic” amidst significant tension and mistrust with the Orthodox Church as “a plea for indigenoussness – a bid to distance the Evangelical Church from the foreign mission that had ceded it” (Sharkey 2008:204). In 2004 the church changed its name formally to the “Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt” in an attempt to distance itself from the Coptic Orthodox establishment. The term “Copt” went from being a statement of national belonging in 1957 to implying in 2004 too great an implication in the Orthodox Church’s hierarchy. These changing designations of “Copt” tell a story of both a plea for national belonging as well as contestation over “properly” Christian modes of practice and belief.

Tensions in the latter half of the twentieth century most often centered around the Evangelical church’s frustration with the perceived stranglehold that the Coptic Orthodox

⁴⁸ Echoing, again, broader colonial ideology, these missionaries saw “[w]omen, and girls in particular [...] as vital bearers of the modernisers’ message” (Vivian Ibrahim 2011:31). See Paul Sedra’s *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers, and Education in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (2011) for the emphasis of Protestant missionaries on education among women.

hierarchy increasingly took on political representation of Christian Egyptians to the Egyptian state, especially in regards to personal status laws. The Coptic Orthodox Church has its own personal status laws distinct from both the Muslim Egyptian population and other recognized Christian institutions (including the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt). The only permissible reasons to dissolve a marriage in the Coptic Orthodox church are marital infidelity or religious conversion (Mahmood 2012:56). The Evangelical community, in contrast, falls under the earlier 1938 personal status laws that enumerate nine legitimate grounds for divorce. According to Egyptian law, however, in the case of a marital dispute, if the marriage partners fall under different personal status laws, e.g, one Orthodox partner and one Evangelical, then Muslim personal status laws adjudicate marriage dissolution.

Much to the chagrin of the Coptic Orthodox Church, in effect, this system encourages, Coptic Orthodox Christian men and women who face abuse or a contested divorce to convert to Islam or another Christian denomination in order to take advantage of the more flexible divorce laws (Khalil 2011). In an effort to close up this legal loophole and maintain what it sees as its rightful religious authority, the Coptic Orthodox Church, with the cooperation of both the Catholic authorities and leaders of the Evangelical Synod, drafted in 1978 and again in 1998 a unified personal status law that would apply to all Christian Egyptians regardless of denomination. Even though the president of the Evangelical Presbyterian church has signed off on the law, some Evangelical pastors refuse to recognize his approval, saying that they wish to remain under the 1938 laws and that passing the law will only lead to more Christians converting

to Islam to gain the benefits of easier divorce (Church Source: Church Seeking Unified Personal Status Law to Avoid Conflict 2011; Bayoumi 2010).

Aside from these legal standoffs, the Coptic Orthodox church is still wary of the evangelizing impulse of the Evangelical church and the attractiveness of churches like KDEC that have such well-developed and far-reaching youth programming, especially for middle and upper-class youth.⁴⁹ For their part, Evangelicals are suspicious of increased politicization of the Coptic Orthodox hierarchy and what many of them see as a stagnant and too impersonal religiosity.

I have traced in this section the main moments and spaces that illustrate the fissures that cross-cut and define the Christian communities of Egypt, with particular regard to what are the two most important Christian denominations in Egypt, both socially as well as politically. It was in the context of these contemporary debates and historic tensions that the 18-day Tahrir protests erupted on the scene, replete with striking slogans of religious unity between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. For my interlocutors at the church, however, a more important religious unity was being formed between Coptic Egyptians, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Catholic. This unity was nowhere as obvious as in the “historic” 11-11-11 prayer night.

CHRISTIANS AND COMMUNITAS

⁴⁹ At an Orthodox conference in Fayyoun in 2009, Bishop Bishoy, the highest ranking bishop under Pope Shenouda in the Coptic Orthodox Church, alleged a plot by Evangelicals to convert the entirety of the Orthodox community to Evangelicalism in just a couple of decades. As evidence of this plot he pointed out the large conference KDEC was to put on later that month at their desert retreat center in conjunction with IHOP. This raised a public row between leading Evangelicals and the Orthodox establishment (Cornetta 2009).

Touted at KDEC as a ‘historic moment’ in the history of the Egyptian Christian Church, on November 11, 2011, all Egyptian denominations sang and prayed together for their nation in a prayer vigil throughout the night in the iconic Cave Churches in Moqattam. Pastor Sameh predicted in subsequent sermons that people would hereafter “say Egypt before 11-11-11 and Egypt after 11-11-11.” My interlocutors were unanimous in their characterization of this inter-denominational cooperation as a moment of miraculous rupture in historical denominational strife among Egyptian Christians. In fact, this evening was one of the few entirely positive acknowledged manifestations of the divine *rahīb* that was shaking Egypt.⁵⁰ In this section I describe this 11-11-11 prayer event and then use Victor Turner’s concept of liminality to understand some of the processes at play in this event and the performative work it did, at KDEC more broadly and also among my interlocutors.

11-11-2011: “A NIGHT OF RETURNING TO GOD”

⁵⁰ One of the most intriguing parts of this story was widely discussed in KDEC, and apparently on the Internet by Evangelicals involved in the event. On the day before the event began the Coptic Orthodox Church issued a statement that, since the event was being held at a Coptic Orthodox establishment, only Orthodox priests would be allowed to speak from the stage. This caused a great deal of frustration on the part of Evangelicals, especially those who had figured prominently in the organization of the event. But Pastor Sameh, who had been planning to give a short sermon and lead some prayers, responded in a statement that the Evangelicals would still participate. Over the course of the night, the cameras often settled on Pastor Sameh, sitting in the front row of the audience. A week later in his sermon, Pastor Sameh extolled the event and reiterated KDEC’s commitment to such inter-denominational meetings saying, “No matter who goes up on that stage, we are going to pray.” In the combined prayer meeting scheduled for March 23 (but postponed due to Pope Shenouda’s death on March 19), Pastor Sameh was scheduled to share the stage with Orthodox and Catholic priests. This wrinkle in the story, though widely known in the church itself, was suppressed in the media and official accounts of the event, illustrating again the fault lines that are made now visible, now invisible in representations of “Christianity in Egypt.”

The night air was cold, and I wrapped my fleece tightly against my neck. We had arrived several hours late to this historic evening of prayer at which from six in the evening to six the following morning, Christians from all the denominations of Egypt would gather together at the Cave Churches in Moqattam and pray and sing all night long for the nation of Egypt and the Egyptian church. By the time of our arrival, the main sanctuary of the Cave Church was already full. Sarah, one of my interlocutors who had previously worked at KDEC for years and was a strong proponent of the *Bait al-Salah* movement, led us to the entrance overlooking the rows and rows of cement pews that ascended in a kind of lazy escape from the cramped stage seemingly carved into the side of the mountain. Everywhere I looked the pews were filled with people; the walkways between the pews looked like narrow rivers teeming with people crisscrossing the audience up and down, left and right. I would have elected to stay outside at the more spacious temporary seating set up in the parking lot adjacent to the church entrance. Hundreds of chairs covered in red felt material were lined up in front of a large projector screen and people milled in and out of their seats between the bathrooms, canteen, and makeshift tattoo booth. But Sarah was insistent that there was more space available inside than it might look to us, and so we plunged into the masses making our way slowly to the other side of the sanctuary. Once we got over to the far side the only space we could find even to stand in was amidst tangled wires and sound equipment. We sat down among the cables but shortly thereafter I was physically ushered to sit in a pew with one open space a number of rows away from my group's precarious seating among the sound equipment.

The emotional energy generated through the night was palpable. From my seat I rarely felt the cold chill of the night air, engulfed in the layers of body heat. A group of twenty-something young men sat on my left, alternatively leaning forward, heads down almost to their knees in prayer with the priest on stage, and jumping and pumping their fists to the up-tempo praise choruses. When I first arrived the “seats” beside me were piled high with bags and flags, but within the hour two young women came and sat beside me, slowly peeling away cotton bandages from their wrists where they had just gotten small Coptic cross tattoo from the tattoo booth outside.⁵¹

When we entered we heard up-beat rock music reminiscent of the music played at KDEC during the week. I recognized only two songs during the six hours that I was there but the chord progressions, feel-it-in-your-chest driving bass, and swaying and bodily postures of the audience all made for a very familiar corporate worship experience.

This type of modern rock music, however, was followed by a short (sometimes, though, very long) prayer by a Coptic Orthodox priest holding a wooden cross and personally addressing God. These spoken prayers always then segued into a chanting chorus to which the audience could sing along. This chanting prayer often was carried, however, simply by the priest –strongly Arabized and without any instrumentation, unlike the rock music led by a chorus clad in white collared shirts and black slacks or

⁵¹ A small Coptic cross tattoo on the inside of the right wrist is a prevalent practice among Coptic Christians, although it seems to me, less so among more elite or urban Copts. It symbolizes religious commitment, participation in the sufferings of Christ, or a pride in one’s heritage as an Egyptian Christian. My interlocutors told me that the practice came from the days when Coptic Christians were persecuted and killed for their faith, and they wanted to ensure that their children would be raised by, and as, Christians. In contexts of inter-religious violence like the Maspero massacre, however, this bodily marker can become a risky liability.

skirts who stood in the far right corner of the stage. The first Coptic priest I saw was a soft-spoken older gentleman with a gentle voice that seemed to simply carry the shape and emotion of the words themselves without any imposition or direction. At the end of his chant the audience began their own chant that was at once a seemingly spontaneous and surprisingly regular portion of the night. In the familiar beat (that I would find out later is also, perhaps originally, a football chant) “*Yasū*’! *Yasū*’! *Yasū*’!” (Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!) The energy of the crowd was deafening, and during the chants the priest would simply stare out into the crowd sometimes for upwards of three minutes.⁵²

The entire night was a unique blend of Evangelical- and Orthodox-inflected singing, praying, and bodily comportment. A few times I made my way to the canteen or out for a breather in the cool night air to get away from the compacted sanctuary, Whenever I met KDEC members, I was greeted with words of disbelief and enthusiasm about the Christian unity that was being experienced and performed that evening. Given the high levels of distrust and isolation that had characterized these denominations in Egypt leading up to January 2011, how does such a “historic” event come to be not just imagined among the leaders of these institutions but realized in an event that was widely publicized as garnering seventy thousand attendees?

LIMINALITY AND SOCIAL EARTHQUAKES IN EGYPT

Victor Turner in his theorization of liminality posits three phases which “accompany every change of place, state, social position and age” (1995:94): separation,

⁵² One popular YouTube clip from the evening has the audience chanting this “*Yasū*’!” chant for ten minutes, accompanied by percussion from the band on stage.

liminality, and re-aggregation. The middle phase, the liminal, has been the locus of a great deal of anthropological attention. In it the liminal entity is characterized by a pervasive ambiguity that denotes a “cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (1995:94). In the final stage the subject once again re-enters the formal structures of a community, bearing the rights, responsibilities and obligations of his/her new ‘structural’ type. But perhaps the most important feature of the liminal stage is what Turner called *communitas*, a process of intense “homogeneity and comradeship” that marks this in-between stage of social life.

Due to its poetic and flexible nature, the concept of liminality has had wide theoretical purchase for explaining the processes of change in individuals, social groups, or even large-scale societies. In fact, liminality and *communitas* were invoked to understand the kind of ethos that was created during the protests of the 18 days in Tahrir Square that forced Hosni Mubarak to abdicate the presidency of Egypt. The language of Tahrir Square, whether manifested in rhythmic chants, colorful signs, or Facebook pages like “We are all Khaled Said” (dedicated to a young man brutally killed by police forces in Alexandria on June 6, 2010), celebrated this idea that the revolutionaries were creating a space free of sectarian, class or religious distinction. In Turner’s language they were experiencing *communitas*, a product of the liminal political stage in which the country was becoming dislodged from its previous structures (social and political) and entering into a temporary stage of anti-structure (Peterson 2011). Many of the interlocutors that I spoke with who had participated in the 18-day protests, and many who had not but were “pro-revolution,” indicated that this was one of the most important “positives” of the

revolution.⁵³ The idea that sectarian divisions in Egypt had been erased by these days of intense social bonding under the strain of state-directed violence and a media propaganda campaign had wide purchase among these KDEC interlocutors. This “unity” (the word most often used by my interlocutors) manifested itself most importantly in two regards: among Egyptian Christians, and between Christian and Muslim Egyptians.

Perhaps the most important public moment for KDEC during the year was its service for the Martyrs of the Revolution that was held on February 16 at the church building. The service commemorated both the Muslims and Christians who had given their lives in the historic protests of January 2011. Most controversial among other Evangelical churches, however, was the decision to invite Islam Lotfi of the Muslim Brotherhood to present the main address during the commemoration (Knickmeyer 2011).⁵⁴ David, one of the leaders of the Political Activism Committee whom I introduce in chapter 4, told me about one of these moments of rupture in the sectarian script so familiar to religious communities in Egypt. We were talking about participating in protests and David told me that through 2011, especially for the months following Mubarak’s ouster when there was a protest in Tahrir Square every Friday, he and about

⁵³ My conversations at KDEC were all in English, so there were certainly linguistic nuances that I missed by not being able to conduct my interviews and conversations in Arabic. One area which would have benefited from a better grasp of Arabic was the very common way of framing the “revolution” in terms of having *positive* and *negative* outcomes that could be evaluated separately and weighed against each other. *Positives* included increased inter-religious unity, and increased attention to corruption both in everyday life and higher levels of political power. *Negatives* included increased petty crime, economic instability, more violent but isolated incidents of sectarian violence, social instability, traffic delays due to the concrete ‘walls’ scattered around the downtown area, the rise of Islamist politics, etc. The negatives list was generally longer, but the “items” on the positives list held greater promise for significant change in the future.

⁵⁴ Lotfi, a prominent member of the youth wing of the MB, was later expelled from the party for co-founding a political party, the Egyptian Current Party.

100 colleagues from the church would go to the Square – “if they agreed with the demands.” I jokingly said that he must not have been there for the Salafi protests. He was taken aback. He and some of his very ‘risky’ friends had, in fact, gone to the Square and invited thousands of Salafis to the church building to perform their ceremonial washing and prayer. While he was standing at the entrance to the church, a reporter from a news channel approached him for comments about the decision. I asked him what he said to them and he grinned at me and threw his hands in the air: “If they are really seeking God, then we will pray that they will find the true God, and what better place to find God than the church?”

As David impressed upon me in this conversation, and as Pastor Sameh impressed upon the congregation during his sermons about the 11-11-11 prayer gathering, these events are not just moments of increased kindness and tolerance but, to return to an earlier theme, moments of *rahīb*, miraculous and terrifying changes in the relational and social structures of Egypt that are part of an intervening movement between the perceived old demonic structures that dominated and restricted Egypt under Mubarak and the yet-to-be-seen new structures of Egypt.

In my reading of the sermons that I heard and the conversations that I participated in that this sense of liminality, of being in “the betwixt and between” (Turner 1995:95), meaningfully represents the way that the leadership of KDEC see this moment in Egypt, albeit framed by a divine intention. Turner notes that this period of liminality is often related in symbolic terms to “death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon” (1995:95). Like the highly symbolic language used to describe these ritual stages that Turner explicates in his

work on the Ndembu, the primary metaphor employed at KDEC (especially from the pulpit) was that of earthquakes or shakings. Repeatedly in sermons, Pastor Sameh and other teaching staff invoked verses from the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews to describe the processes being undertaken in Egypt:

At this time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken – this is, created things –so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’ (Hebrews 12:26-29)⁵⁵

During 2011 Egypt has seen a variety of startling new developments that served as public markers of rupture: the January 1st Alexandria Church Bombing, the 18 days in Tahrir, the October Maspero Massacre, the 11-11-11 prayer meetings at Moqattam, the late November Mohamed Mahmoud protests, the first round of parliamentary elections in December. These events, however, all seemed to be moments that provided startling (sometimes welcome and sometimes not) re-arrangements of taken-for-granted patterns of relationship, coalition, or antagonism. Nadia, an Egyptian Evangelical interlocutor who does not attend KDEC but is actively involved in the broader Evangelical community, extended this shaking metaphor in a different direction but with a similar theme:

⁵⁵ The author is quoting the Old Testament prophetic book of Haggai, who is prophesying about God’s imminent judgment. The second quote, “God is a consuming fire,” from Deuteronomy 4:24 refers to the iconic scene in the Pentateuch (the first five books of both the Jewish scripture and the Christian Old Testament) where the God of Israel manifests himself on the top of Mt. Sinai cloaked in a dark thunder cloud. It is the moment of commencement of the Mosaic covenant and, arguably, the moment in the Old Testament narrative in which the nation of Israel as the people of YHWH comes into being.

Now is the time when the ground is completely shaken and tilled. Come put seeds now. If you come when it is safe then the ground is settled and *khalas* [that's it]. The seeds that are planted are planted [...] Now is the time when the ground is tilled and everything is turned upside down. And I think that this is what KDEC is modeling. It is saying in the middle of dirt flying everywhere we put seeds, because if the dirt settles then the planting time is over.

Liminal entities in Turner's conceptualization are marked not only by increased camaraderie and egalitarianism, but also by cruel and punishing conditions. They are stripped of all the securities and familiarities of their previous social status "as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life" (1995:95). It is this part of the theory of liminality that encapsulates so nicely the process at KDEC. The images of flying dirt, shaking earthquakes, and consuming fires are all biblical images that leaders at KDEC draw on to articulate the processes of social upheaval and the constantly re-inscribed lines of coalition, antagonism, and possibilities of religious co-existence.

Because of their theological commitments to seeing the *rahīb* completed and the prophetic voice of the Christian church maintained in this liminal time of shakings, the leaders of KDEC have used institutionalized discourse to anchor the congregation (especially the more mobile elite segments of the church) in a national imagined community, shaped by biblical texts (like "Blessed be Egypt my people") and by narratives recounting the integral role that KDEC played in bringing political change to Egypt.

For example, in a sermon in early December 2011, just a week after the Mohamed Mahmoud protests and on the heels of the first round of Parliamentary elections, Pastor

Sameh spoke about the unique position of Evangelical Christians in the Egyptian state. He began the sermon with the metaphor of earthquakes: “All of us are sure that 2011 is a very special year...So many earthquakes have shaken Egypt and the surrounding area. I am speaking of social earthquakes. So, the last social earthquake was the election.”

Pastor Sameh said that these “earthquakes” sent many church members to his house and the houses of his friends. They expressed their fear of the processes unfolding in Egypt, especially the landslide win of the two leading Islamist blocs, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi al-Nour Party, and sought his guidance on whether to emigrate. His purpose in this sermon was to make a public declaration about this collective sense of fear and precarity. Animatedly, he recounted the concerns of the congregants he spoke with, each issue punctuated with staccatos: “People come to me trembling! Things are getting worse! Stock market! Currency! Tourism! Investments!” But in response to the question of whether people should emigrate, his answer was decidedly negative. He pointed above his head to the large banner that hung over the stage and reminded the congregants that were sitting in the pews that night of the *rahīb* that they had witnessed and had been instrumental in bringing into being. What sense would it make to leave in the midst of a moment of divine intervention in Egypt for which this community had been waiting for a decade? In this moment of collective disillusionment, fear, and general confusion about the promises of democracy Pastor Sameh reminded the congregation that:

We have two citizenships, two nationalities. One is Egyptian, and when we vote we do so because for this life we are Egyptian citizens. The other is heavenly, and this citizenship is written in the book of life. We have dual nationality. I am an Egyptian citizen. I drink from this river; I eat from this land. But our real story is in heaven.

In some ways we have come back full-circle to the framework that started this chapter: the waterlogged Bible floating down the Nile, at once noting the exceptional favor of God toward the Christians of Egypt and the territorial anchoring of this particular kind of Coptic Christianity (Orthodox and Evangelical) in an ancient and contemporary Egyptian imagined community.

AN EMERGING MOMENT

I have argued in this chapter that the category of “Christian in Egypt” or “Christian minority of Egypt” is often invoked in a deceptively superficial or homogeneous sense, which does justice neither to the heterogeneity nor to the multi-vocal inter-denominational character of the body of people in Egypt who identify as *messīhīyyīn*. Indeed, by focusing on the historical and social character of the Evangelical Church in Egypt and the contemporary negotiations of public discourse and religious unity at KDEC, I have provided some analytic points of leverage for understanding the permutations that the category “Christians in Egypt” has undergone in the tumultuous year of 2011 and early 2012. In particular, I have tried to tease out the way these moments of liminality are articulated at KDEC and are utilized as framing devices in institutionalized discourse in order to consolidate a sense of belonging and cohesion of Evangelicals toward other Christians, toward particularly pious Muslim groups, and toward the imagined national community of Egypt. During this liminal year, however, that homogeneity is never simply a given. Discourses of unity are always at some level performative, partial, and emergent.

CONCLUSION: WHAT BECOMES OF THE POLITICAL?

At the end of the thesis writing process, long after I had completed my fieldwork, I attended a prayer service at KDEC. I was chatting with some friends in the courtyard after the service when someone called my name from the crowds of people. I turned to see Maged, the young man with whom I spent time during the Mohamed Mahmoud protests from chapter 2. He was navigating his way through small enclaves of friends catching up on life and exchanging stories from the last week. I had not seen him for months. He greeted me enthusiastically and exclaimed that he had great news for me: A leading liberal political party had recently hired him. He beamed as he told me about the political figures that he was meeting and the way that this position had completely changed his view of Egypt.

We got a hot tea in paper cups from the church canteen later that week before a *Bait al-Salah* shift and sat in the shady courtyard. I asked Maged what had led him to apply for the position, since when I had first met him (before the Mohamed Mahmoud protests) he had described himself as woefully ignorant about the political process in Egypt and lacking in motivation to participate either in the revolutionary protests in the Square or in more formal processes of electoral politics such as joining a political party or carefully following current events. Without hesitation he said that it was his experience in the late November Mohamed Mahmoud protests that functioned as this

turning point. Before participating in those protests, like most people at the church, Maged was apathetic toward the protests because he could not believe that any action from the protestors could effect substantial change. But he went to the protests in Mohamed Mahmoud at the request of some of his friends and saw first-hand the excessive violence of state security forces. It was this violence that convinced him to, as he said, “care about my country, care about my future.” His friends were not all that interested in the new passion that Maged had found for politics. Nevertheless,

I’m not OK with a lot of people in the church who say that all that we have to do is just pray. But I think we have to act. Of course, praying is very important but I’m not ok with *just* praying. Jesus when he was on earth acted with the people, active with the news. He didn’t just pray all the time.

The way Maged frames his latest engagements with politics, revolutionary protests, and faith-based commitments illustrates many of the process I have described in this thesis project. Through the *Bait al-Salah* prayer movement, and the ranks of the Political Activism Committee; from the tear gassed, raucous, and violent Mohamed Mahmoud protests to the austere white-stone sanctuary of KDEC filled with upbeat praise choruses; from a chilly midnight prayer vigil in the Cave Churches of the Moqattam Mountains to the cramped upper prayer room in Tahrir Square, Evangelical youth like Maged have been negotiating their own various revolutionary and religious commitments.

As Maged alludes to in the above statement the terms of political activism and religious devotion have been in this year in a state of constant negotiation. These negotiations included debates as illustrated in chapter 2 and chapter 4 about how political efficacy is to be imagined and pursued – through protests and electoral politics, or through prayer and practices of piety. These negotiations are also illustrated at KDEC by

the widespread desire for modernity in the form of secular-liberal democratic processes and the concomitant fear of what kinds of illiberal forces those processes might unleash. These negotiations are also present in the fragile and fracturing category of “Christians in Egypt” and the way that discourses of unity intersect with the increasing sense of precarity of Egyptian Christians in the face of largely successful Islamist political groups in post-Mubarak Egypt.

Maged’s story is unique among the congregants that I spoke and spent time with and I do not re-visit it as a kind of “arrival” story. As I have argued the space that the congregants and church leaders are carving out in public discourse is about *more* than representation in parliament, *more* than simply guaranteeing the right to build churches, and *more* than their ability to participate equally in political parties with their Muslim compatriots. This thesis has been about how negotiations of religion and revolution create new imaginaries of the political, new possibilities for political activism, and new kinds of citizens. In *this* sense, Maged illustrates that struggle from the black folding chairs of *Bait al-Salah*, to the tear gassed streets of Mohamed Mahmoud, to talking the minutes for a meeting of leading liberal MPs. His process, was, and will continue to be, one of emerging possibilities, disillusionment, and commitment, but never of “arrival.” It is, however, within these complex negotiations of class position, religious commitment and community, and feelings of national belonging that the possibilities for being Evangelical Egyptians - prayer warriors or political activists, revolutionaries or dissidents – in revolutionary Egypt emerge.

These events and processes, discourses and communities, are creating the possibilities for certain religio-political subjects. I return to Webb Keane’s definition of

subjects as “historically and culturally specific and semiotically mediated, constructions of the nature of the human and its capacities” (Keane 2007:55). In very explicit terms the leadership of KDEC are creating discourses that define the parameters of the human and its capacities to be religious and political subjects in the nation-state of Egypt and in the worldwide evangelical church. As I have argued, this vision of the human revolves around both liberal discourses of freedom, democracy, and rights-bearing individuals and around evangelical discourses of moral uprightness, pious living, and prophetic prayer. And, as a year of unexpected ruptures and “earthquakes” like 2011 is apt to remind us, these imaginaries and subjectivities are always being re-arranged, de-constructed, and re-imagined. As Nadia, the evangelical woman not involved with KDEC I introduced in chapter 3, said to me:

I think that what KDEC is doing now is putting a huge question mark for a lot of the churches in Egypt. And the question is: Can you be a good Christian and not be a good citizen? And that is going to be the biggest question and struggle for all the people watching what KDEC is doing these days: Can you be a good Christian and not be a good citizen?

These negotiations have been born of the many ruptures that have populated the socio-political landscape of Egypt in 2011, from the 18-day uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak, to the proliferation of popular protests all over the country, and the terrifying Maspero massacre and battle of Mohamed Mahmoud. These “earthquakes” have prompted all Egyptians actors to a great deal of improvisation. It is these ruptures and improvisations that I have tried to narrate and explore in this thesis. I have argued that the leadership and youth at KDEC, for a host of reasons, have often been hesitant and timid actors in the Egyptian public sphere, especially in terms of outspoken support for the demands of revolutionary protestors or a more widespread participation in the

political events, parties, and processes that have proliferated across Egypt, a reality that many of the interlocutors that I have introduced in this work have bemoaned. But leaders and youth at KDEC have undoubtedly enacted improvisations, new activisms and projects on a wide variety of themes. These are the themes that I have tried to draw out of conversations, sermons, and small group meetings at KDEC: unprecedented moments of inter-religious communitas, revolutionary intervention that is exercised through prayer and piety, and the proper moral training and emotional disposition of the ideal Egyptian citizen.

Like Maged's story, these processes are never stories of "arriving." In fact, at the end of this writing process, on March 17, 2012, Pope Shenouda, the Coptic Patriarch for forty years, passed away after a long health struggle. In the wake of Pope Shenouda's death, the Egyptian and international media have almost unanimously presented this latest leader of the Coptic Orthodox Church as both widely loved by Coptic Egyptians and deeply controversial in respect to his 'politicization' of his religious authority. Journalists and commentators wrote moving memoirs of a religious leader who was at once a spiritual guide for Coptic Christians and a problematic model of religious authority being wielded in the public arena. One need not read very many of these reflections to come away with the conclusion that Shenouda had exercised a singular and simultaneous political and spiritual leadership in the church and that this has left an indelible mark on the Coptic Orthodox Church and his own legacy. Given this history, Pope Shenouda's death and the process of succession, I would argue, will undoubtedly constitute another "rupture" (like the Maspero Massacre or the Mohamed Mahmoud protests) around which possibilities of what it means to be citizens, religious subjects,

and political actors for “Christians in Egypt” will emerge. There is no “arrival” in this story, but rather a messy, emerging, and often contradictory process of becoming.

I, however, close this particular engagement with a poignant illustration of the kinds of unique negotiations and emerging possibilities at KDEC vis-à-vis the Coptic Orthodox Church and the revolutionary protest movement at the close of this historic year: the January 7, 2012 Christmas Day Celebration. This event had important symbolic connection to the horrific January 1, 2011, Alexandria church bombing, the January 7, 2011 Christmas Masses in which Muslims served as “human shields,” and the anniversary of the January 25 protests that deposed Hosni Mubarak. The main Coptic Orthodox Christmas Mass was performed as usual by Pope Shenouda at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Abbassia, the seat of the Coptic Orthodox Church. In attendance was Sami Anan, a highly visible member and spokesperson for the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, which still ruled Egypt but was coming under severe public scrutiny (Haddon 2012). In contrast, the Christmas service at KDEC was attended by a variety of Muslim and Christian “intellectuals, politicians, activists, artists and newly elected MPs” among whom were Amr Moussa (a leading presidential candidate and a liberal), the celebrated novelist and political commentator Alaa al-Aswany, and Ahmed Harara, a dentist who lost one of his eyes to injuries sustained in confrontation with state security forces in protests on January 28 and the other eye on November 19 (Ezzat 2012). Coming at the end of this particular study of Evangelical Egyptians and their revolutionary, religious, and political negotiations, these two contrastive Egyptian Christian services serve to illustrate the ongoing emergent process that congregants at KDEC have carved out in the

Egyptian public discourse about citizenship, national belonging, and the place of faith-based institutions in the Egyptian public sphere.

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