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*DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL LANGUAGE*

*Middle East & North African Studies III*

*Report: 2013*

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***TITLE: A STUDY OF THE GROWING  
COPTIC MINORITY IN SWEDEN***

*REPORT: Autumn 20*

## Executive Summary

This paper carefully deliberates on the growing Coptic minority in Sweden to understand why the Copts move from Egypt to Sweden and to know how they perceive their possibility to practice their religion in their new settlement. The paper employs semi-structured (open-ended questions) interviews with both lay and clerical members of Coptic immigrants in Sweden and on the analysis of the data collected from interviewees to verify the research problem. The paper elucidates generally the basic picture of the Copts and the Coptic Church in Sweden.

Thus, the result indicates that the Copts migrated to Sweden for both reasons of religious persecutions and economic crises in their home country. It shows that the Copts residing in Sweden are happy and appreciate the liberty and freedom that they have to practice their religion in Sweden without tension; unlike in Egypt where the Copts live in fear of attacks from fundamentalists (terrorists) groups. The investigations prove that the Coptic Church is a religious minority in Egypt and a less known Church immigrant in Sweden. The Copts members in Sweden struggle to help their new members to integrate in the Swedish society and at the same time would like to keep or maintain their transnational community; so as to preserve their (Coptic) faith. However, the historical narratives of the Coptic Church as celebrated in Sweden and other immigrant communities refers always to its apostolic foundation in Egypt by St. Mark.

The deeper understanding of the results about Copts' situation in Sweden shows that Coptic Church uses history and narratives as a reminder to its members to ensure continuity and to preserve their religious identity in transnational boundaries. Meanwhile, a good number of Copts are Swedish citizens and a good number of them who migrated from Egypt and other countries to Sweden speak Swedish too. The fact is that through re-connections and contacts of the Copts in Sweden, the other Copts in exile are gathering in Sweden because of the positive experiences of those already residing in Sweden are telling them. Some have moved from other European countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece to Sweden. This is due to the fact that Sweden is found in a better economic situation and is calm and liberal by comparison.

The first group of Copts came to Sweden in 1970s due to problem situation in Egypt at that era. During that period, there were only very few of them that came to Sweden. Initially, they used to hire a place and invite a priest from Egypt to come and conduct Church Services for them. However, in 1980s when many of the Copts started to come to Sweden, the then pope sent one of their monks (a priest) to come and live in Sweden so as to help the Copts in taking care of their spiritual needs through the celebration of Sacraments and conduction of Church Services. They obtained their first own parish in Sweden at Hägersten in 1980 by (Barsoom) a Coptic monk. It was bought by the members of the Coptic Church through loan. Since then, their number has been increasing.

Today, the Copts own five Churches (Parishes) in Sweden; these are

Stockholm: (Hägersten) St. Mary & St. Paul Church

Södertälje; St. Mina Church

Gothenburg; St. George Church

Malmö; St. Demean church, &

Gävle; St. Moses & St. Cyril Church.

Meanwhile, there are also other places which they hire for church celebrations and activities such as in Hallunda, Tensta, Norrköping årebro, Jakosberg and karthäll. They have twenty church celebrations (liturgy) every week in Stockholm. Outside church activities, they do also organise social activities such as children's summer (al-karaza). There is also an organization of yearly European Youth Convention (EYC) which holds every year in different countries of Europe. It was held for the first time in Sweden in August 2012 in Stockholm with the number of 500-700 youths in attendance. In 2013, it was held in Milano in Italy. Other social activities are football matches and music competitions among children and the youths; sometimes between Coptic in different European countries. The members make monthly, financial contributions or donation to the welfare of their Church. It is from these donations including some help that they receive from other organizations such as SST & Bilda that they do pay their churches' rent and take care of other church needs. The members of the Coptic Church give special attention to the youth because she believes that a Church without youth is a Church without future.

Currently, there are about five thousand (5, 000) or more Copts residing in Sweden while the estimated number of Copts families is one thousand (1000). There are six Coptic priests in Sweden; sometimes they travel to offer Church Services (Sacraments) both to Norway, Finland and Denmark. Presently, they have one bishop (Abakir) for the whole Scandinavia whose chair or seat is at St. Mina Church Södertälja in Sweden.

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper is based on semi-structured interviews with both lay and clerical members of Coptic immigrants in Sweden and on the analysis of the data from the interviewees and Coptic encyclopaedia website. Up until a couple of years ago, the Coptic community in Sweden was rather a small one. But it's membership has been growing since last few years due to the troubled situation in Egypt. The study focuses on Copts and Coptic Church in Sweden to know why they move from Egypt to Sweden and to understand how they perceive the practice of Coptic faith in Sweden compare to Egypt. The investigations elucidate generally the basic picture of the Copts and Coptic Church in Sweden; such as who are the Copts? What is their historical background & belief? Why have they migrated to Sweden? Where are they residing? Etc. In a nutshell, the study gives an account of the presence of the less known Coptic minority among faith communities in Sweden.

### 1. 1. Research Question

Why did the Copts move from Egypt to Sweden and how do they perceive their possibilities to practice their religion in Sweden compare to their home country?

### 1.2. Purpose

The intent of this study is to verify and understand why the Copts move from Egypt to Sweden and how do they perceive, or view their possibilities to practice their faith here in Sweden compare to Egypt.

### 1. 3. Method & Material

I intend to employ qualitative interview method (semi-structured). This will focus on individual face to face in-depth interviews that seek to understand about individual experiences and perspectives on a particular issue while considering relevant ethical issues in regard to the rights and the protection of the participants. This in effect is because, interviews are most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants. They are also suitable for exploring sensitive topics where participants may not want to talk about certain issues in a group environment. This method appears more suitable and is most likely to produce better results for this kind of study.

As Bryman notes, “Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2008: 336). The flexibility of the interview by qualitative researchers makes it more attractive; because it is seen as the most widely employed approach in qualitative research. This method often tries to get meaning, interpretation and understanding of phenomena, and it is difficult to generalize issues, but provides more in- depth knowledge.

The materials are the data from interviewees both from the lay and clergy of the Coptic Church residing in Sweden. The study of the Coptic encyclopedia & other Coptic websites were also used for more understanding of the research problem. Academic articles were also used as secondary sources to compare and to support primary data for the analysis and conclusions.

I discussed with one of the Copts priests and other lay members within the church premises, but from different parishes. The others were from outside the Church premises; six persons were precisely interviewed in the Church premises. While others were outside the Church such as at

stores and at SIF Comvux Centre. However, the interviews were limited to the Copts in Sweden. It included men and women, young and old, with exception of people under 16 years of age. The number of people interviewed were all those available and willing to share their perceptions and feelings. The investigation was carried out by visiting some the places where the Copts are residing in Stockholm such as at Södertälje, Hägersten, Hallunda, Jakosberg and Tensta. In one of the contacts received, the interview was carried out through telephone with one of the Coptic members residing in Gävle. (He has lived in Sweden for 13 years with his family).

Apart from the church premises mentioned above, I met some Copts in the business shops (sellers) here in Stockholm and had discussions with some of them, according to them, some have stayed 4, 5, 8 years and even more in Sweden. Our conversations yielded reasonable answers which served as good informatics for the current study. In addition to the interviews, I studied “Coptic encyclopaedia” and other Coptic websites like (copts.se) for more information on historical backgrounds of the Coptic Church. Through a good number of the literatures on the earlier research concerning the historical backgrounds of the Copts & the backgrounds of conflicts in Egypt were learned. The data from those sources served as materials for the write-up, analysis and conclusions in this study.

The people I interviewed sounded open, sincere and cooperative. Precisely, six (6) individuals within the Church premises and two persons outside the Church premises including two priests were interviewed. Thanks to “Max Stockman” from (SST Sweden) that those people’s contact were reached within the church premises; while the other two was one at the shop and the other at SIF Comvux. All our discussions were interesting; because, they were full of informatics and useful to understand the research problem. Interestingly indeed, a good number of materials were collected from the people interviewed.

Of course, not without difficulties; the first encountered problem was that two people (later replaced) that were willing to share their experiences in response to the question concerning the problem issue can only communicate in Arabic; but they were replaced because they could not communicate either in Swedish or in English. And which was serious handicap because; as already mentioned, this type of study is a sensitive research and needs individual in-depth interviews so that the participants might feel free to share their experiences without fear of being threatened by the presence of another person such as an interpreter. Moreover, some of these people were still undergoing certain degrees of trauma with their experiences back home; although the idea was later changed only to those who have stayed little longer in Sweden. This is because, the newly arrived were much afraid to discuss their experiences with an outsider or a stranger. One of the participants told said that he is not even sure whether this inquiry might equally become another form of persecution against them here in Sweden.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a theoretical perspective. It can be simply a theory, but it can also be the basic approach to understanding something. According to the definition of University of Southern California (USC); the theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory which explains why the research problem under study exists. The selection of a theory in this work depends on its appropriateness, ease of application, and explanatory power. This study employs “transnational and marginalization lenses to understand the research problem of this work. What is transnationalism? According to web definition, it is a social phenomenon and scholarly research agenda grown out of the heightened interconnectivity between people and the receding economic and social significance of boundaries among nation-states.

### 2.1.

Transnationalism can also refer to increasing transborder relations of individuals, groups, firms and to mobilizations beyond state boundaries. Transnationalism as relevant theory is that the emergent approaches in migration theory describe ways in which contemporary migrants live in “transnational communities”. Again, since transnationalism and identity are two concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition, it could serve as a good optic to understand different dimensions of Copts presence in Sweden. As Erdal M (2013) puts it, the typology is presented as a tool to enable migration scholars to move beyond simple acknowledging the co-existence of transnationalism and integration towards an analysis of the nature of interactions between the two; understand in relation both to particular places and contexts and to the human beings involved and their functional, emotional and pragmatic considerations.

As Berger (1990) on the other hand rightly puts it, the society in its essence, is a memory. Through most of human history, this memory has been a religious one. The process of passing a religious account from one generation to the next involves interpreting the past and explaining why things are the way they are. Berger (1990, 1969) said that religion uses history as a “reminder” to its followers of their past, since they as humans tend to forget its past. This process ensures continuity between the present and the past. And this is typical of the case of the Copts & the Coptic Church communities in transnational boundaries. Hervieu-Léger (2000) defines religion as a “chain of memory”, arguing that while religion is anchored in tradition, the act of recalling the past is essentially religious. However, scholars have debated strongly on how the past is remembered collectively which many researchers have adopted albeit in different contexts.

The historical narrative of the Coptic Orthodox Church according to Botros (2006) provides a perfect illustration of the argument on collective memory and religion thanks to its unique

historical trajectory and to its new complex role as a transnational religious organization. This historical narrative of the Coptic Church as celebrated in immigrant communities is what Botros termed as “the early glorious era”. As the Church narrates this era, the reference is its apostolic foundation in Egypt in the first century by St. Mark the evangelist. Where the application of diaspora theory is inappropriate, alternative theoretical frameworks may give greater insight into migrant identity. And one possible alternative is transnational theory. The value of transnational theory is apparent in cases where an immigrant group is small and disparate. It is on this ground that “transnationalism” appears more appropriate to explain the actual research problem. Not to ignore other contexts within which movement takes place that has been transformed by political, social & technological upheaval.

2. 2.

Marginalization lens is employed also in this case to understand why some people migrate to other cross-border territories due to subjection of people to a lower social standing or outer limit of society. The Copts felt oppressed through the face of marginalization. In other words, the violence in Egypt is more directed towards the Copts. This might provoke people’s movement (in this case, the Copts) beyond national border. It might as well explain in particular why Copts moved to Sweden? Most obviously, due to high secularized society and religious tolerance in Sweden compare to Egypt. Hence, the recent events have exposed an attempt to silence difference and invited renegotiations of the Copts’ position in Egyptian society. As Galal (2012) noted that Christianity not only makes a difference as a sign of the Copts’ minority position, but also simultaneously offers Copts a way out of their marginal position as a minority. The national narrative of sameness limits the possibilities the Copts have to raise issues about inequalities. This means that the national claim of sameness as one Egyptian does not prevent the minoritization of the Copts.

### **3. Backgrounds**

It is longer than most of the Egyptians can remember since Egypt has been in the system of authoritarian system of government; that is it has always been dominated by a president. As Angrist (2010) noted, the current political system emerged in the wake of military coup in 1952; when a group of army officers overthrew a king whose family has governed the country since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since then, Egypt’s political evolution for over a century and a half had left a strange mix of political arrangements in the country. Initially, the monarchy was held by a family of Albanian origin who has tried to rule since early 1800s when Egypt was under the province of Ottoman Empire. The family managed to rule almost independently for a period of time, the country was bankrupted by the late 1870s, leading to domestic unrest as well

as international pressure on Egypt to pay its debts. Even in 1882, when Great Britain occupied the country to put down an Egyptian rebellion, it maintained the ruling family.

After the British leaders and the Egyptian leaders might have negotiated on allowing the country independence, while keeping it in the British sphere of influence, when the negotiations broke down, Britain declared Egypt partially independent in 1922. In effect, Egypt between 1922 and 1959 combined democratic and monarchical features; though legally an independent state, but the British continued to play a strong role. That notwithstanding, the military overthrown system in 1952 swept away not only monarchy but also the parliament and the pre-1952 political party system such as political and social organizations; from Muslim Brotherhood to labour unions. Thereafter, they established a highly centralized system with a single political party. The new rulers claimed to have abolished titles, and to be much more egalitarian, but also on a policy level, eventually adopting socialism. Under Mubarak, Egypt has passed through series of political liberalization and crackdown without any fundamental changes in the system.

The conflict between Copts and Muslims in Egypt has been accentuated and echoed once more lately due to escalating conflict after the ousting of the former president Mubarak on January 2011. Some often argue that Egyptian upheavals are not necessarily religious issues, neither is it between Christians and Muslims. According to the talk delivered by two representatives from Egypt during the seminar (interreligious-dialog) held on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2013 at World Culture Museums in Sweden; the conflict in Egypt are not between Christians and Muslims; but rather the provocations are coming from different religious background and instigators both inside and outside. They claimed that the Copts and Salafists have more similarities than differences, but they were only afraid of each other while both sides felt oppressed and marginalized by the government before 2011 revolutions. The conflicts as they said were between powers and superpowers, but along the line they will be using religion to camouflage and achieve their interest. To exemplify this unity among Muslims and Copts that exists in Egypt was in 2010 when the Church of Alexandria was bombed; Muslims helped to protect their Christian brothers and sisters. They testified that the conflicts were among the two superpowers; the military & Muslim Brotherhood was in effect fighting who will fill the vacancy or the gap of the regime after Mubarak.

They acknowledged the fact that political landscape have largely changed in Egypt which brought about the decline of the establish authority in 2011. The young Egyptians (generation) are fed up they said with whichever religion they belong to, whether Christianity or Islam. They need new ways of leadership knowing that Egypt is culturally diversified. The society needs to break that barrier of fear, learning to know each other because, working together will have huge benefits to the Egyptian society. Without doubt, this will help to build new generation leadership. It is a pity they regretted that it's only sad moment that brings Egyptians together.

Meanwhile, Zeidan D (1999) argues that the rise of Islamic movements since 1930s and especially of the fundamentalists' resurgence since the 1970s broke that consensus and pushed

Islam again to the fore as the common denominator of the majority, thus leaving the Copts out in the cold. As a result, many Copts left their country for North America, Europe and Australia. However, Paul Rowe (2009) acknowledged that it is noteworthy that the ascendance of the church was both in spite of and as a result of the relative marginalization of the Christian population. Thousands of Copts have emigrated; because they felt that they were exposed to continuous and subtle pressures. As Paul Rowe (2009) noted “The increase in violent attacks on Copts during the 1990s and the publicity given to particular sectarian incidents such as the al-Kosheh incidents of 1998-2000 have created a widespread understanding of the Copts as a persecuted people”.

Even though not all Muslims are involved in those attacks, some of the fundamentalists believe that those who are Christians are unbelievers and so they deserve to die. Moreover, some of these Muslim fundamentalists believe that if you kill a non- Muslim, you get more rank in heaven. More seriously still, if anyone does not observe “Sharia law” step by step, that person deserves death because they believe that Sharia is the law of God. So, the Copts have long been suffering for fear and discrimination but enduring all in silence. “There is no doubt that Islam takes primary place in Egyptian public life, and many Copts complain of discrimination in some fields” (Angrist 2010: 219).

### 3.1. The Copts & the Coptic Church

Who are the Copts? They are direct descendants of the Pharaohs. According to the definition given by one of the interviewees (Coptic deacon) Copts have two definitions; ethnicity and religion. From the original meaning, Copts means Egyptians. Today, Copts has been identified by the Egyptian Christians. Presently, all Egyptians are not Copts; Copts is now referring only to Church belonging not nationality.

What do the Copts believe? They strongly believe that the Coptic Church is direct establishment as an Apostolic Church, whose founder is St. Mark. One of the apostles St. Mark came to Alexandria in 48 AD; during this time, he established the Church of Alexandria, ordained the first Bishop (Anianus) who later became the second Patriarch of the Coptic Church. Of which today, Pope Tewedros II is the 118<sup>th</sup> Patriarch succeeding St. Mark. Egyptians before the arrival of St. Mark were religious-minded people which helped in spreading out Christianity quickly across the land of Egypt before the Islamic conquest of Egypt in 640 A.D.

These are historic periods of Egypt after the Islamic conquest; the Rule of the Ummayyads in 655 A.D, the rule of Abbassys about 750 A.D, the rule of Tullunids 870-910 A.D, the rule of Ikhshids 935-970 A.D, the rule of Fatimids 970-1170 A.D, the rule of Ayubids 1170-1250 A.D, the rule of Mamluks 1250-1510 A.D to the rule of Ottomans 1510-1806 A.D.

Muhammad Ali (Albanian) is truly considered the founder of the modern Egypt, and his family ruled Egypt from 1806- 1952 A.D. The British occupation lasted from 1882-1952 A.D. Egypt became Republic in 1952 to present: Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952-1970), Anwar Sadat (1970-1981), Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), Morsi (2012-2013), and Adly Mansour (2013 till present).

The Pharaonic era dates back to 3000 years B.C. The Greek (Alexander the Great) conquered Egypt in 323 B.C., and new capital of Egypt was named after him as “Alexandria”. After his death, Egypt was ruled by his general, Ptolemy who founded the Ptolemaic that reigned from 323 B.C. to 30 B.C. The Ptolemies established a large library in Alexandria, which was considered the greatest in the world at that time. Rome then ended the Ptolemaic rule and the reign of Cleopatra in 30 B.C. In 640 A.D., the Arabs (Amr Ibn Al-As) conquered Egypt and besieged the Fortress of Babylon until the surrender of the Byzantine forces in 641 A.D. Due to Nasser’s nationalization movement, many Copts suffered loss of lands and properties. The Copts at present are fully integrated in the Egyptian society; however, they are restricted from critical ranks and positions within the Egyptian government.

### 3.2. The Copts in Sweden

The first group of Copts came to Sweden in 1970s due to problem situation in Egypt at that era. During that period, there were only very few of them that came to Sweden. Initially, they used to hire a place and invite a priest from Egypt to come and conduct Church Services to them. However, in 1980s when many of the Copts started to come to Sweden, the then pope sent one of their monks (a priest) to come and live in Sweden so as to be helping the Copts in taking care of their spiritual needs through the celebration of Sacraments and conduction of Church Services. They obtained their first own parish in Sweden at Hägersten in 1980 with the help of Barsooma, a Coptic monk. It was bought by the members of the Coptic Church through loan. Since then, their membership has been increasing.

Today, the Copts have five own churches (parishes) in Sweden;

Stockholm: (Hägersten) St. Mary & St. Paul church, Södertälje; St. Mina church, Gothenburg; St. George church, Malmö; St. Demian church, and Gävle; St. Moses & St. Cyril church.

Meanwhile, there are also other places which they hire for church celebrations and activities such as in Hallunda, Tensta, Norrköping årebro, Jakosberg and karthäll. They have twenty church celebrations (liturgy) every week in Stockholm. Outside church activities, they use to organise social activities such as children’s summer (al-karaza). There is also an organization of yearly European youth convention (EYC) which holds every year in different countries of Europe. It was held for the first time in Sweden in August 2012 in Stockholm with the number of 500-700 youths. In 2013, it was held in Milano in Italy. Other social activities are football matches and music competitions among children and the youths; sometimes between European Coptic

competitions. The members contribute or donate whatever one has each month; it is from these donations including some help that they receive from other organizations such as SST & Bilda that they use to pay their churches rent and other church needs.

Currently, there are about five thousand (5, 000) or more Copts residing in Sweden while the estimate number of Copts family is one thousand (1000). There are six Coptic priests in Sweden; sometimes they travel to offer Church services (sacraments) both to Norway, Finland and Denmark. Presently, they have one bishop (Abakir) for the whole Scandinavia whose chair or seat is at St. Mina Church Södertälja in Sweden.

#### **4. Reports on the Actual Study**

I interviewed a middle-aged Coptic priest who has lived in Sweden for almost 2 years. During our introduction, I asked him about the history of the Coptic Church in general, and their belief; he took me round in one of the Coptic Churches here in Stockholm and briefed me on the historical background of the Coptic Church in general. I asked him why he came to Sweden. He said that it is due to the problem situation (conflict) in Egypt. Focusing on the Coptic Church in Sweden, he gave me a lot of information about the present situation of the Copts in Sweden which he includes that many families are still struggling to get apartments while living with their friends or with other church members before getting their own apartment. He added that even himself (the priest) has stayed for one and half year without his own apartment; trying to squat with somebody. He said that shelter is one of the basic needs for human being, and when you don't have it, it becomes another type of persecution to one's life.

I asked him further what the Copts community do for the Copts here in Sweden. He told me that the Copts community helps their members spiritually. For the new ones, the church allows them to stay in the church premises about one, two or three weeks before they get a place to stay on their own. The community takes care of their feeding and clothing depending on the person's situation. They help them to get their papers from the skatt, immigration and with the commune. Actually, the church is not only working for the spirituality of their members, but also tries to help them to integrate into the Swedish society with their laws so as to be able to help themselves. Moreover, they help the Copts with the language translations for those seeking for Asylum. Three other interviewees gave the same account.

I met a Swedish middle-aged man who is a deacon in the Coptic Church in Sweden. He has been a member of this church for 16 years. I asked him about the history of the Coptic Church in general, and about the members in Sweden. He narrated to me the origins of the Coptic Church (based on the preaching's and traditions laid down by St. Mark the apostle) and their belief. He said that initially, Copts means "Egyptians" but today, the term is only used for Christians. He told me that there are about five thousand (5000) Copts presently in Sweden and about (1000) families. They own five churches (Parishes) in Sweden. He also told me that generally, the Copts

are categorized into three in Sweden; the Copts born and raised in Egypt who have migrated to Sweden; the Copts born and raised in Sweden by Egyptian parents and grand-parents. And the Copts who are converted to the Church in Sweden from variety of ethnic backgrounds like himself.

The next question was why many Copts move to Sweden? He told me that more Copts have recently come to Sweden because of religious persecutions and insecurity in Egypt. The fact is that everybody is facing this problem of insecurity in Egypt, but the Christian are facing double problem of persecution as being Christian too. I met with a middle-aged woman who is a member of the Coptic Church. She has lived in Sweden for 15 years. I asked her in my interview on why she came to Sweden. She told me that she tried to get herself out of their country because of the high level of religious persecution and insecurity. She said that people especially those living in Cairo, Alexandria and some other parts of Egypt live most often in tension due to conflicts. She decided with her husband to move to Sweden.

One of the participants told me that the Copts have been victims of attacks and have been suffering in the mist of these conflicts for a long time. I further asked her to explain her views and how she understands the origin of the conflicts. She replied that she could not explain why the conflict sparks from time to time, but she only knows that the Copts have been attacked severely by the terrorist groups. I asked her who she thinks that those terrorists might be. She replied that they are Muslim extremists, and then added; not all Muslims were responsible for this type of behaviour, because some of them are good people. One of the interviewee told me that he cannot just say why he came to Sweden because he moved with his parents when he was almost 10 years, but he can only remember that often there were problems of fighting and killing of people in Egypt, and often that time; his parents used to be bitter and tensed. I asked him why those fighting and killing? He said that he does not know and could not explain really what was happening then.

One of the interviewee ( a middle-aged man) who is selling food stuff in one of the shops in Stockholm who has lived in Sweden for 11 years responded to my question on why he moved from Egypt to Sweden that he left Egypt for two reasons; economic and insecurity problems. I asked him, if he could explain more on why economic and insecurity purposes made him to abandon his fatherland to settle in Sweden. He said that the eruption of conflicts from time to time in Egypt makes life difficult for ordinary Egyptian to live without tension and fear all the time. He told me that he first went to Spain, but after some time life became more and more difficult in Spain due to economic crises there. He later moved to Sweden; because he was informed that Sweden is calm and in a better economic situation in comparison to where he was.

I met with a young Copts (University student) who is a member of the Coptic Church. He has lived in Sweden for 24 years. I asked him in my interview why he moved to Sweden. He told me that he came to Sweden with his parents when he was 3 years old and so, he cannot explain what was happening in Egypt at that time neither can he precisely say this is why he came to Sweden.

He only learnt about their relations who died in Egypt due to conflicts. I asked him whether he inquired from his parents who are responsible for the killings and why those conflicts. He said that it is difficult to explain although he understands that ordinary Muslims and Christians in Egypt want to live in peace and harmony with one another, but the problem is with the terrorists groups. I asked him who those terrorists groups are. He told me that according to some people from Egypt, the fundamentalists Muslims were responsible for the attacks. While some are saying that the conflicts are not between the Christians and the Muslims (they are together); but rather that the conflict has been among the regimes, the Egyptian army and the Muslim brotherhood. While others say that the police and the Egyptian army are responsible for some of those attacks.

One of the interviewee (a middle-aged woman who migrated to Sweden in 1992) reported that the Copts have been suffering for a long time in the hands of some fundamentalists Muslims in Egypt, but it was hidden because nobody talked about it. Even as she could remember, the situation was hard when she left Egypt back 1992. For instance, the attack on Copts at al-Kosheh village by Muslim fanatics was hidden because nobody talked about it except now that the Copts outside could voice it out. This is due to the fact that they have been living in fear in their so-called native land. Thanks to media and modern technology that today everything is exposing. She said that some Copts girls were kidnapped and forced to marry some Muslim men. Woe to their families; if the girls refused, they would be killed and at the same time, their families would be eliminated, yet nobody discusses about that till today. On the other hand, some of the Copts boys from the wealthy families were also kidnapped. Their families had to pay huge sums of money before the boys could be released, otherwise, they would have paid with their lives.

Furthermore, I asked the following question to the participants; how do the Copts perceive their possibility to practice their religion in Sweden compare to Egypt? One of the participants replied that in one part, the Copts are happy for security purposes, they feel secured. They have peace and tranquillity of mind during church celebrations and other church activities in Sweden. But on the other hand, some of them are unstable and worried here in Sweden because of accommodation problems.

He concludes that the Copts are happy especially towards the Swedish government that allows each person to practice religion according to one's belief. Mostly, they appreciate having churches (own parish) to celebrate their church services and to preserve their relics and objects of religious importance.

One of the interviewee who has lived 15 years in Sweden said that in Sweden the Copts felt secured, knowing that they could not be attacked during religious services. She told me that they feel grateful and happy because, here in Sweden, everyone is free and has right to practice whatever one believes. This makes people feel more at home. She added that they are really happy because one's life is calm; they go to work, to school and to the church without being afraid of attacks. But sometimes she feels sad when she remembers her relations suffering these

troubled situations in Egypt. Then, I added another question on whether the Copts are thinking (as collective memory) that one day they will go back to Egypt? She said that many of them that have their children in Sweden are no longer thinking of going back to Egypt, however, few of them still nurture such thought.

One participant (a deacon) who has served in the Coptic Church for 16 years in Sweden replied that since he was a Swede, and only had experienced the church in Sweden, his reply could only be based on the testimonies of those he spoke and works with. He told me that those he spoke with were surprised that one could celebrate his /her religion in such calm and freedom without fear and tension as in Egypt. He added that the people he ministers to are very happy with the situation that religious people are free to practice whatever they believe in without tension. The members are happy and appreciate the freedom of religion in Sweden he said.

One interviewee said that he is happy and relaxed here in Sweden because his parents like church and are both active in the church activities back home but without peace of mind. But now they practice their faith without tension. They are at peace and no longer live in fear as in Egypt. He added, "I think that other Copts who must have experienced those crises and tensions in Egypt would surely appreciate this calm atmosphere of religious freedom in Sweden when compare to Egypt".

Another participant told me that he is happy in Sweden if not for anything; because of the calmness and tranquillity of mind, unlike in Egypt where people live in tension and fear all the time because of killings and bombing of churches here and there. He said, "I am happy here and I think other members of the church (Coptic Church) also appreciate this freedom and tranquillity of mind they have in Sweden".

One of the interviewee who came to Sweden with his parents at the age of three whose response to my research question was based on people's testimonies told me that he is happy about this freedom of religion in Sweden; and without doubt, the other church members especially those who have experienced or witnessed the catastrophic moments in Egypt surely appreciate more this freedom of religious worship in Sweden. At least, they are secured and freed from fear and persecution because in Sweden one is free to practice one's religion.

To edit or make this report logically, Many Copts generally left Egypt to Sweden primarily because of the trouble situation in Egypt. This is confirmed by the result of the responses by the participants through research question; why do the Copts move from Egypt to Sweden? Almost all the interviewees mentioned Egyptian crises which is the origin of the Copts dispersal to transnational borders including Sweden. Not ignoring very few who said that they left Egypt for both insecurity and economic reasons. Secondly, it is obvious that people coming from such fragmented and aggressive society like Egypt are most likely to appreciate such calm and organised society like Sweden. This also proved it's reality through the participant's response to the second part of the research problem; how the Copts perceive their possibility to practice their

religion in Sweden? All feel happy and appreciative towards the Swedish society in general. Not to put aside some inconveniences encountered by some Coptic Orthodox members in Sweden mainly on accommodation problems.

## **Analyses**

I employed “transnationalism and marginalization” perspectives in seeing and explaining this social phenomena. Transnationalism is a relevant theory here because it describes ways in which contemporary migrants live in transnational communities. Since transnationalism and identity are two concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition, it serves as a good optic to understanding different dimensions of Copts’ presence in Sweden in connection with other Copts in transnational borders. This means that the Copts in transnational borders such as in Sweden still identify with the Copts outside Sweden. In effect, the Copts in Sweden are able to connect other Copts in other parts of Europe for instance informing them that Sweden is calm and it is in a better economic situation compare to the places where some Copts are living.

Berger (1990) said that religion uses history as a reminder to its followers about their past which ensures continuity between the present and the past. This is the case about the Copts and the Coptic Church communities in transnational boundaries. They use these transnational communities to maintain Copts identity through contacts with the help of modern technology and other Church activities to re-connect each other. Another example is found in the result of the actual report where Copts do organize European Youth Convention (EYC) every year in different countries of Europe; which helps them to maintain and preserve their religious identity beyond transnational borders.

Marginalization is another lens which was employed to explain or understand why many Copts left Egypt to move to Sweden and other cross-border territories. The subjection of people to utter limits of the society as in the case of the Copts in Egypt will definitely provoke people to migrate beyond national borders. The research result shows that generally there are insecurity problem in Egypt, but it is apparent that the violence in Egypt are more often directed towards the Copts and the Coptic Church. So, the Copts felt persecuted and oppressed through the face of marginalization. Furthermore, due to marginalization, the Copts emigrated beyond national border which might lead to different dimensions of transnationalism. It explains also why many Copts are moving to Sweden; obviously, due to religious tolerance and freedom of worship in Sweden and certain degree of equality in the Swedish society in general compare to Egypt.

## **Conclusion**

The focus at same and open-ended interrogation to individual Copts in Sweden can be considered an opening for understanding the simultaneity of diverse and converging responses of the Copts experiences on why they migrate to Sweden and their perception on the possibility in practicing their religion in Sweden. The main argument is that the Copts have been dispersed in exile to other nation-borders in the first place due to persecution through faces of marginalization. Thus, a crucial observation is that it has been long that the Copts endured those attacks from some of the fundamentalist Muslims. Although the authorities of the Coptic Orthodox Church has been negotiating with the regimes to keep and maintain national (identity) unity. However, they would also like to preserve their Coptic (faith) identity. Today, some of the Copts outside Egypt can no longer stomach the pains and their experiences by voicing out the reality about their situation in Egypt.

Moreover, the fact remains that the Copts in exile gather more and more in Sweden because of the contacts narratives of the positive experiences of those already living in Sweden; a good number of them migrate from other European countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece to Sweden. This is because, some of the Copts living in other parts of Europe were informed by their relations residing in Sweden that Sweden is in a better economic situation and is calm by comparison. They tell other Copts about their freedom to practice their religion and other church activities without tension. Some of the Copts in Sweden have ambivalent feelings about returning to Egypt. While some of them are still nurturing this feeling that one day they will return to Egypt when the condition is better. However, a good number of them are no longer thinking about returning to Egypt; especially most of them that have their children here in Sweden. Whatever may be the case, the future of the Copts in Sweden depends on the relationship between the Copts and the Swedish government.

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