DISSERTATION / DOCTORAL THESIS

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Christian-Muslim Relations in the Context of the Video “The Innocence of Muslims” in Egypt, Israel Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories (September 2012)

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**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FJP</td>
<td>Freedom and Justice Party, Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAF</td>
<td>Islamic Action Front, Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICG</td>
<td>International Crisis Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Palestinian Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POC</td>
<td>Proche Orient Chrétien Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIIFS</td>
<td>Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Transliteration**

The system of the IJMES was used to transliterate Arab words. Names and words that are familiar to the readers were kept in their familiar form. In the case of Egypt, the pronunciation of the “g” was kept for names.
Introduction

In September 2012, a video entitled “The Innocence of Muslims” provoked an uproar in the Muslim world and seemed to raise far-reaching questions about the identity, the belonging, and even the loyalty of Christians in the Arab World. Thus, this Ph.D. thesis aims to analyse the issue of Christian-Muslim relations in the context of this video by comparing reactions to it in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories. Before defining the scope of this Ph.D. thesis, the introduction will first consider the various dimensions of the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims” in these countries.

The Video “The Innocence of Muslims”

In early September 2012 a video entitled “barāʾat al-muslimīn” (“The Innocence of Muslims”) was released in colloquial Arabic on YouTube. It was produced by extremist Copts in the US and was subsequently widely discussed on Egyptian Salafi TV channels. The video showed a group of Muslims attacked Copts while the police did not interfere. The second part of the video explained the “cause” of this persecution through a look at the character and life of the prophet Muhammad. Resorting to clichés of Christian apologetics in early Islam, the video consequently describes Muhammad as a womanizer, child-molester, and ruthless killer.

The video triggered widespread reactions and protests in the Arab and Muslim world. Given its features – its synchronisation in Arabic, the fact that Copts in the diaspora were responsible for it, and its very negative description of the prophet Muhammad – “The Innocence of Muslims” clearly had the potential to seriously damage already fragile interreligious relationships in Egypt, especially since the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo published cartoons on Islam just after the release of this video. However, not only both in Egypt and in the region as a whole, key Christian and Muslim actors tried to prevent an escalation and avoid potential violence against Copts in Egypt.

Previously, similar events had likewise caused uproar in the Muslim world. “The Innocence of Muslims” seemed to be part of a series of criticisms of Islam that had taken place in the West and was already making waves in the Muslim world. This series comprised the novel The Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie (1988-1989), the so-called Mohammed cartoons published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten (early 2006), the speech by Pope Benedict XVI in Regensburg (September 2006),1 the short-film Fitna by the Dutch MP Geert Wilders

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1 In this controversial speech, Benedict XVI quoted the Byzantine emperor Manuel II: ‘Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to
(2008), and the burning of copies of the Quran by the American priest Terry Jones (September 2010). Yet some of these events actually used the theme of Islam to criticise specific issues; Benedict XVI was criticising secularism in Europe and Jyllands-Posten was commenting on self-censure. In addition, the uproar resulting from these events in the Muslim world occasionally seemed manufactured. For instance, although Jyllands Posten published the cartoons in September 2005, the controversy only gained momentum in late 2005 and early 2006 after Danish Muslim actors had toured the Middle East and drawn attention to these cartoons.

Some of these events had an impact on Christian-Muslim relations and did result in backlashes against Christians. For instance, a protest in reaction to the “Danish cartoons,” which was held in front of the Danish embassy in Beirut, turned violent and a nearby Maronite church was attacked (see Section 3.3.1.1). Similarly, following Benedict XVI’s lecture in Regensburg, churches in Nablus and Tulkarem in the Palestinian Territories and in Gaza were firebombed (Kårtveit 2014, 102). In these two cases, local Christian symbols were targeted.

As a result, the video “The Innocence of Muslims” embodied a sensitive and potentially dangerous moment, more so since this time the criticism against Islam came from within, i.e. from Copts originally from a Muslim-majority country, Egypt.

**The Context of September 2012**

The various reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” seemed to point to the various problems the countries of the Arab Spring were facing. In the first place, these protests raised questions about weakened states and security forces, as US embassies (or consulates) were assaulted by protesters in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Besides, following the Arab Spring, Islamist forces dominated in Egypt on a political and discursive level, as the Muslim Brother Muḥammad Mursī won the presidential elections. Thus, September 2012 was the second year into the Arab Spring and the third month into Mursī’s presidency. Overall, the January 25 2011 Revolution had created a different framework for Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt.

Besides this, the conflicts in Iraq and Syria had provoked anxiety amongst Arab Christians about their future in the region. In particular, the plight of Christians in Iraq following the war in 2003 had heavily traumatised the Christians in the region. In addition, the war in Syria ongoing since 2011 had put a severe strain on Lebanon.

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Christians in the Arab World

This section will give a short overview of the religious and political situation of Arab Christians, the question of their Arab identity, the history of Arab Christians under Islam, and the question of sectarianism.

An important issue of concern for the Christians in the Arab world is their decreasing proportion in the countries they live, although their absolute numbers have actually increased (Heyberger 2013, 18). Currently they represent approximately 7-10% of the population in Egypt (6-8 million); 2% in Israel (150,000); 5.5% in Jordan (350,000); 36% in Lebanon (1 million); and 1.2% (60,000) in the Palestinian Territories (Heyberger 2013, 15-17). However, estimates for the proportion of Christians in the various countries vary and will be further discussed in the introductions to each chapter.

The high level of religious, cultural, political, social and economic heterogeneity of Christians in these countries is noteworthy. As regards religious diversity, no church can lay claim to being a “national church” with the exception of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Maronite Church. Yet the other churches in Egypt and Lebanon have questioned this claim. The wide range of churches emerged following a number of ecumenical councils. In 431, the council of Ephesus saw the emergence of a separate church, the Assyrian Church of the East (and later the communion of parts of this church with Rome, the Chaldean Catholic Church). Following the Council of Chalcedon in 451, a separate Alexandrian tradition (the Coptic Orthodox Church), an Armenian tradition (Armenian Apostolic Church) and an Antiochian tradition (Syriac Orthodox Church, the Maronite Church) emerged. The churches that accepted the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon were the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Amongst these churches, some of them or parts of them entered in communion with Rome: The Chaldean Catholic Church, the Coptic Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, the Maronite Church, the Greek Catholic Melkite Church. In addition, the Vatican re-established in the nineteenth century a Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem. Besides, some Protestant churches, particularly the Episcopal and Lutheran churches, are officially recognized in these countries; however, many non-recognized Evangelical churches also exist (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 5).

Another field illustrating the high level of heterogeneity of Arab Christians is their political representation. While there are quotas in the Palestinian Territories and Jordan that over-represent Christians, there are no such quotas in Egypt. As a result, until 2011, Mubārak used to nominate Copts to the Parliament to compensate for their under-representation. In
Lebanon, the confessional system guarantees the representation of every single community. This representation is not limited to parliament, but also covers the presidency and the position of parliamentary second speaker; these positions are occupied by a Maronite Christian and a Greek Orthodox Christian respectively.


This latter suggestion is put forward by Joseph Maïla, who asked ‘pourquoi donc s’archarner sur “Arabes Chrétiens” alors qu’ils sont Arabes?’ (Maïla 2004, 38). The denomination Chrétiens d’Orient, which is widely used in French, is criticised by Antoine Fleyfel for implying these Christians are homogenous despite the variety of countries they live in (Fleyfel 2013,15). Interestingly, Kāmil Jābir, the former director of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies in Jordan, evoked the plurality of his identities: ‘I am a Christian by faith and I am a Muslim by culture and identity’ (Sabra 2014, 146). These various and seemingly contradictory and competing dimensions of identity, cultural belonging, being Christian and/or Arab, proximity to or otherness to Islamic culture and history were widely expressed in the different Christian reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.”

This question of the Arab identity is rarely mentioned in Western scholarship on Christians in the Arab world, although the most widely used term to designate these Christians in Arabic is al-masīḥiyūn al-ʿarab, “Arab Christians.” Bat Ye’or argued: ‘Far from recovering and defining their true identity, they chose to assimilate with the culture of their conquerors: Arabization implied abandoning the Syriac culture and language and repudiating 12 centuries of dhimmi history’ (Ye’or 1996, 202). In contrast, besides the historical Christian Arab tribes like the Ghassānid, some Christian scholars in the Arab world tend to systematically predate the Arabization of Christians to before the Islamic conquest in an attempt to enshrine the Christians historically and culturally in the Middle East. By quoting the Epistle to the Galatians 1:11, the Greek Orthodox priest and intellectual, Georges Massouh, stated that ‘from the establishment of the Church on, Christianity spoke in Arabic’ (Massouh 2013).

All in all, these different discourses on the identity of Christians are, to some extent, the result of the varying historical experiences of the Christian communities with Islam. Although important Christian polemics were of Greek Orthodox extraction, Greek Orthodox Christians have generally tended to emphasize their Arab identity more and also contributed to the
emergence of Arab nationalism, a tendency exemplified through people like Michel Aflaq or Anṭūn Saʿāda, the founder of the Syrian Social National Party,2 because this community had an historical experience of coexistence with Muslims in the cities. In this regard, Patriarch Ignāṭyūs IV Hazīm of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch offered the example of John of Damascus (676-749) who was a high ranking official in the administration of the Umayyad Caliphate. The patriarch also differentiated between John of Damascus’ religious identity and his political loyalty (Ignatius IV. Hazim 2005, 491). In contrast, the Maronites, who enjoyed much more religious and political freedom in Mount Lebanon, tended to reject their so-called dhimmī-status. The former Lebanese president (and Maronite) Bachir Gemayel (Bashīr al-Jumayyil) expressed his desire for ‘a real country for Christians where we can hold our heads high, without anyone telling us […] “walk to the side”’ (Nga Longva, Roald 2012, 63). Overall, both Christian and Muslim actors constantly refer to history and recall certain historic examples. For instance, the pact between Caliph ʿUmar and Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem was said to enshrine the relationship between Christians and the new Islamic rule. It will be mentioned in Chapter 4 in the context of the Palestinian reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims,” and was used to prove good Christian-Muslim relations in the Palestinian contexts.

In this context, the concept of “dhimmi” (dhimmī) was popularised by Bat Ye’or. Bernard Heyberger objected that this concept essentialises the situation of Christians under the rule of Islam (Heyberger 2013, 105-106), and argued that this “dhimmī”-status developed throughout time as a reaction to (specific) circumstances (Heyberger 1994, 39). Actually, the individual personality of different Caliphs and the economical and international situation at any given time had much more impact on the status of Christians (Corm 1969, 173) than general legal frameworks.

Recent scholarly findings have indeed shed light on close Christian-Muslim interactions and shared values. Prior to the nineteenth century, Christians widely used the Islamic legal system for succession, marriages, and commercial contracts (Heyberger 2003, 53). There are reports on nineteenth-century Transjordan of Christians abstaining from consuming alcohol and pork as well as reports about Muslims baptizing their children (Rogan 1999, 28). Thus, Jean Corbon, the Melkite priest of French origin, wrote that Christians and Muslims were ‘ façonnés par la même histoire, partagent une culture, une civilisation et une mentalité’ (Corbon 2007, 150). As the example of Transjordan shows, Christian-Muslim coexistence prospered in the absence of firm ecclesiastical and governmental structures (see Heyberger 2013, 139).

2 About the Syrian Social National Party, see Section 3.2.1.
An important feature of the countries analysed in this Ph.D. thesis is the historical institutionalisation of sectarianism. Until the nineteenth century, the central state, whether in Ottoman Syria or in emerging khedival Egypt, had not had the means to continuously assert its control throughout the country. In 1856, the hatt-i hümayun established the equality of all Ottoman subjects and abolished discrimination based on religion. However, even if such discrimination had previously existed in theory ("dhimmî"-system), this does not mean that they actually existed in practice, as there was no state to enforce them. In fact, local Ottoman bureaucracy was more interested in maintaining law and order. Moreover, the growing European influence throughout the nineteenth century exerted by means of Western schools, missionary preaching ("re-Christianise Oriental Christians"), and economic control, had deeply destabilizing effects on Christian-Muslim relations, especially in the Syrian provinces, and lead to civil wars. Muslim animosities towards Christians grew as the latter were considered favoured by European powers. Interestingly, local Churches and Christian lay notables used these new opportunities to increase their power within the Christian communities.

**Research Gap**

As the previous paragraphs have suggested, this Ph.D. aims at filling three gaps. Firstly, previous scholarly works dealing with similar events to “The Innocence of Muslims” have only focused on coverage by the Western media\(^3\) and not on the content of the reactions in the Muslim world. Secondly, as of September 2012 the political context had very much changed. Thirdly, a focus on Christian-Muslim relations in the context of “The Innocence of Muslims” provides an opportunity to investigate Christian discourses in the Arab world, an issue little attention has been paid to so far. Previous work on Christians in the Arab world has shown their effort at grounding a Christian presence in this region, both culturally and historically, by uncovering the Christian past; monasteries, churches, etc (Chatelard 2000; Mayeur-Jaouen 2005). Yet little attention has been paid to the discourses supporting these attempts. Analysing Arab Christian reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” is particularly significant, as one may assume that their reactions might have been motivated by preventing backlashes against Christians. Similarly, this focus sheds light on the expectations and attitudes Islamic and Islamist actors had concerning the Christians in the Arab world as far as “The Innocence of Muslims” is concerned, and is thus a display of the possibilities of religious coexistence in these countries, especially following the Arab Spring.

\(^3\) Kunelius, Risto. 2007. (Ed.) Reading the Mohammed Cartoons Controversy: An International Analysis of Press Discourses on Free Speech and Political Spin. Bochum: Projekt Verlag.
Subject of the Ph.D. Thesis and Methodology

The scope of this Ph.D. thesis is the dimension of Christian-Muslim relations in the context of the video “The Innocence of Muslims” in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories in September 2012. The thesis encompasses this broad range of countries because the comparison of the various reactions allows us to uncover the existence of established and structured discourses on Christian-Muslim relations in these different countries. At the same time, the thesis does not extend its scope to Iraq and Syria because these two countries were in a state of war at that time; significant numbers of Christians had been displaced and there were too few reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” for conclusions to be drawn.

Thus, all the reactions to this video in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories will be subjected to the question: How and to what extent was the dimension of Christian-Muslim relations raised in this context? The word “Christian” comprises Christian institutions and key actors in the countries mentioned. However, as previously alluded to, this word itself must be subject to further definition, as its very meaning lay at the core of Christian and Muslim reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” The term “Muslim” comprises Islamic key actors, institutions and, in some cases, the state itself. More importantly the issue of “relations” is to be investigated both at an actual (i.e. joint protests and conferences) and a discursive level, that is to say, how Christians were defined in this context and how Christian-Muslim coexistence was framed.

Three hypotheses were established. First, “The Innocence of Muslims” raised far-reaching questions about the identity, the belonging, and even the loyalty of Arab Christians. Second, the Christian reactions were not only motivated by fear of backlashes. Thirdly, the reactions of the various actors were not only interesting because of what they said about the video but also because of what they revealed about the actor himself.

This Ph.D. focuses on Christian and Muslim reactions to the video, on joint Christian-Muslim reactions (statement, protests, conferences), and on the video’s background and its content. This material (“primary sources”) was to be found in written and oral texts drawn from Arabic newspapers, ecclesiastical magazines, websites like http://www.coptstoday.com/, http://www.abouna.org/, and http://www.al-tawhid.org/, as well as videos.

This Ph.D. is “text-based,” that is to say that philological and historical approaches were used to analyse the sources. These primary sources were individually analysed by means of a contextual analysis to highlight their content and philological aspects. Subsequently, connections were made between the findings of the first analysis, by means of secondary
sources, the context, the background, and the motivation of the primary sources were investigated. Such secondary sources included media articles, monographies, and qualitative interviews.

In the course of the analysis, a number of questions emerged which guided the analysis of the primary sources and these will be answered at the end of each chapter, i.e. each country analysed:

- Who reacted and how? Who was a key player? Did the actor try to mobilize?
- How was the video viewed? Had the actor watched the video and how did he discuss its content? Which goals were ascribed to the video?
- How was the background of the video discussed? How was the involvement of Copts in the production of this video referred to?
- How did joint Christian-Muslim relations take place?
- Was a counter-model to the video formulated? How was Christian-Muslim coexistence defined and explained?
- Which counter-arguments were formulated against the video? Which criticisms? What demands were made?
- Who spoke in the name of Christians? How were the Christians defined?
- What motivated the Christians to react?
- Who spoke in the name of Islam and Muslims? How did they view their role within Islam?
- How did Muslim actors and institutions define the Christians and which role, if any, did they assign to them?
- How were Muhammad and Jesus Christ mentioned in the various reactions?
- How was the violence arising in connection with “The Innocence of Muslims” discussed?
- Were there anti-Christian reactions?

This Ph.D. thesis is largely based on field research that was carried out between September 2014 and May 2015 in Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Amman thanks to the Marietta Blau Grant from the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research. In particular, the archives of the Modern Arab World Research Centre (CEMAM, Université Saint-Joseph), and the Orient-Institut in Beirut; the Franciscan Centre for Oriental Christian Studies in Cairo, the National Library Givat Ram in Jerusalem, and Jordan University were very helpful for gathering both materials in Arabic and ecclesiastical newspapers. In addition, various research centres proved to be very valuable institutions for gathering secondary sources, these include the Faculty of
Religious Sciences of the Université Saint-Joseph, the Orient-Institut Beirut, the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo, Givat Ram and the Ifpo Beirut and Ifpo Amman. Additionally, in all of these cities, a number of qualitative interviews were conducted mainly with Christian church leaders, activists, and key actors. The aim of these interviews was to illuminate the motivations for the Christian reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” and to gather missing information (especially in the case of Jordan).

**Content**

Chapter 1 will look at “The Innocence of Muslims” background and its content. The subsequent chapters will analyse the reactions in Egypt (Chapter 2), Lebanon (Chapter 3), Israel and the Palestinian Territories (Chapter 4), and Jordan (Chapter 5). Each chapter comprises an introductory section that explains the context of each country more clearly. In addition, these chapters were structured differently depending on the particularities of the reactions in each country. For instance, Chapter 5 on Jordan will contain no subsection on joint Christian-Muslim reactions.⁴

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⁴ Except when stated otherwise, the primary sources are referred to in the foot-notes. If these primary sources are websites, the first mention will be complete, whereas all subsequent mentions of these sources, will not mention the Doi. As for the secondary sources, these are referenced to within the text when there is an author, otherwise the reference is mentioned in a footnote.
Chapter 1 The Content and Background of “The Innocence of Muslims”

Following the controversies over the Danish cartoons, the speech by Pope Benedict XVI, and the recurrent polemic surrounding the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, “The Innocence of Muslims” would seem to be yet another (Western) criticism of Islam, focusing primarily on the violence it allegedly promotes and the submission of women. However, both the background and content of this video mean that it is necessary to understand it in the context of a Coptic experience of Islam. More specifically, the video aims to connect the situation of Christians in contemporary Egypt to the very beginnings of Islam. In doing so, the video uses a broad catalogue of criticisms of Islam (apologetics), which was established by early Eastern Christian apologists and then, to some extent, “updated” by the controversial Coptic priest Zakaryā Buṭrus.

Therefore, this chapter is divided into three parts. The first part (1.1) is the transcript of the video, the second part (1.2) traces the background of the video to a small network of Copts living in the United States, and the third part (1.3) analyses the content of the video.

1.1 The Video “The Innocence of Muslims”

Some passages of the video were synchronized. These manipulations are underlined (for their explanation see Section 1.3).

First part of the video

Scene 1. A police officer (Police officer 1), a Coptic doctor and a third person (Rustam) are having a discussion in the doctor’s clinic.

Police officer 1: For your knowledge, doctor, our prophet Muhammad had 61 wives, eleven at the same time. He even had a girlfriend.

Coptic Doctor: I know; I have heard about this.

The police officer turns away and thinks:

Police officer 1 (aloud): If my sick wife died today I would sell the medicine, eat the food, and marry a young girl tomorrow.

Police officer 1 (aloud): I will marry her tomorrow!

Rustam: Oh, congratulations, constable, you should invite me to the wedding.

The police officer: Oh, shut up, Rustam!

The police officer pushes Rustam aside.
Scene 2. An “Islamist mob,” i.e. men dressed in white jilabiyya, bearing a head covering and carrying sticks. At the same time, the muezzin starts the call for prayer.

The doctor runs outside into the street and calls out:

Coptic Doctor: Maria! You upstairs? Maria!

Maria appears on the balcony: What’s going on?

Coptic Doctor: There is an angry mob in the street. Tell your mother to release the patients and close the clinic. We must go home now!

In the background we see women with short sleeves.

A police car arrives with Egyptian flag on it. Policemen get out. The mob destroys everything in the clinic with axes and sets it on fire. The policeman (Police officer 2) prevents his colleagues from intervening:

Police officer 2: Please do not take any action until everything is over and await my further instructions.

An “Imam” with a long beard and a jilabiyya.

Imam: Set fire to this place. We’ll burn this, forsake the Christians.

The mob kills a woman wearing a long dress and a cross around her neck.

Scene 3. The doctor comes home; two women are waiting for him. The home seems well off. There is a cross on the wall, a picture of Jesus and some whiskey on a table.

Coptic Doctor: The Islamic police arrested 1,400 Christians, tortured them and forced them to confess to the killings.

Maria: Why did they do that?

Coptic Doctor: To protect Islamic crimes. The Egyptian police committed force upon the Christians, [cut]. They could have saved thousands of lives and billions of dollars of taxpayers’ money.

The Coptic Doctor takes a pen and begins to write on a flip chart.

Coptic Doctor: Man plus “x” equals Islamic terrorism [but “BT” is written on the flip-chart instead of “Islamic terrorism”]. Islamic terrorism minus “x” equals Man.

Maria: What is “x”?

Coptic Doctor: You need to discover it for yourself.
Second Part of the video

Scene 4. Scene takes place in the desert. Two men are having a discussion, the younger man (Man 1) has a long black beard and the older man (Old Man 1) a white beard.

Old Man 1: A two-year old son whose father has been dead for six years. This is preposterous. This is a stand-up!

Man 1: Father, calm down.

Old Man 1: How can I calm down? My son cannot possibly have a child of two years. We were married on the same day. My son Hamza is six years old now. Well, this is madness!

Man 1: Father, we are not stupid. I know, I understand, father. But we must conceal this disgrace. You must raise him, take him. Raise him as one of your slaves if you must.

Old Man 1: What shall I call him? To whom shall I attribute him?

Man 1: His name is Muhammad and we can call him “of father unknown.”

Old Man 1: If you think it’s right, my son.

Scene 5. Big screenshot of a man (Mohammed) eating meat. Background: oasis. A woman (Woman 1) watches Mohammed eating his meat as if she were hungry. A man (Man 2) comes out of a tent.

Man 2: Mohammed, the bastard. Your Lady summons you.

Mohammed: My Lady? My lady?

He stands up, and the bone falls down. The girl picks it up.

Mohammed: Don’t finish it! I’m watching you! Don’t finish it! Goodness, I know you are a gluttoness.

Woman 1: Ok, Bastard of Unknown father.

Mohammed: What did you say?

Woman 1: Ok … Unknown Father.

Mohammed: Dalel, take me to my lady.

Man 2 seizes Muhammad and drags him into the tent.

Scene 6. Khadija and Mohammed are in the tent.

Khadija: Come in, Mohammed. I command you, sit! [Mohammed sits down] You are not wearing under-garments [turns away, shocked]. Cover yourself.

Mohammed: Sorry.
**Scene 7.** Khadija is wearing a pink dress and a white scarf. Mohammed is beside her; he seems scared and hides between her legs.

Khadija: Do you see him? … Put your head between my thighs. Do you see the devil [?] still?

Mohammed: Yes.

He hides in her arms. She pushes him away, between her legs. Mohammed now has a beard. She draws his face to her.

Khadija: Now, do you see him?

Mohammed looks around.

Mohammed: She’s gone, Khadija, she’s gone! How have you done this?

**Scene 8.** Outside the tent. An old man dressed like a Coptic priest (Bahira), Khadija, Mohammed and a donkey.

Mohammed, laughing, addresses the donkey: And this shall be the first Muslim animal! What is your name? Yafar! His name is Yafar! Yafar, do you like the women? No! Yafar does not like the women!

Mohammed kisses the priest on the hand, Khadija on the lips, and goes.

Khadija: Please, my cousin, you must help us.

Bahira: I will help you, Khadija. I will make you a book for him. It will be a mix between some versions from the Torah and some versions from the New Testament and mix them into false verses.

**Scene 9.** Mohammed and two companions.

Mohammed: And the inspiration has disappeared.

Abu Bakr: Walika is dead and the inspiration has disappeared.

Companion 1: I don’t understand. What is the relationship between Walika’s death and the inspiration?

Mohammed: I should return to the mountain and find a solution or kill myself. I have been to the top of the mountain to jump and kill myself twice before. Now I will. I will kill myself. Now I will kill myself.

**Scene 10.** Mohammed in a group with two companions who look very lustful.

Mohammed: Killing the men, capturing the women, we shall loot the goods, the cats, any animals and anything else we’ve found.

Companion 2: What about the children, master? You know, some of us prefer the children.
Mohammed: May you use whom you wish of the children. The rest shall be sold as slaves to buy more horses and swords.

Companion 2: God, what … free to kill the battle.

**Scene 11.** Three men shake their swords and scream:

*Mohammed is our Messenger and the Quran is our constitution!*

**Scene 12.** An old man (Man 3) speaks to Mohammed.

Man 3: You do not understand [cut].

**Scene 13.** Mohammed is sitting with men and a woman (Woman 3). A woman dressed in pink with a red scarf (Woman 2) is telling Mohammed something.

Woman 2: My husband just set off to the caravan.

Mohammed: Yes. Go and wait for me in your tent. I’m coming.

Woman 3: Isn’t it shameful for a woman to expose herself to a man she does not know?

Mohammed: Haven’t you heard what God has said in the Quran? A master may desire whom he wants and shall be given whom he wants.

Woman 3: God is true in all that He says in the book.

Mohammed: Also, if a married woman offers herself to the master and he wishes to have her, he is allowed, even if the rest of the believers are not allowed.

Companion 1: *Everything Allah says in the Quran is true. How pleasurable are our Islamic ways.*

**Scene 14.** The old man from scene 12 (Man 3) addresses Muhammad who is sitting with his companions.

Mohammed: Remember, God in the Torah commanded the Jews to destroy the city of Jericho. Killing all the people, even the women and the children. Am I right?

Man 3: Yes, Illeh, our God did that. But, if you noticed, he also gave the city a 450-year chance and he didn’t expect extortion. Or ask anyone to convert to Judaism… for your knowledge, we believe in One God. Before you were born, even the pharaohs of Egypt believed in one God - 5000 years ago.

Mohammed: It is not enough to believe in one God. **You must say: “God and Mohammed his messenger”.** Now go, **read the Quran**, move to Palestine or pay the extortion.

Man 3: I received your message and I will not read your Quran!
The man spits, turns away and goes. Two companions make to follow him but Mohammed prevents them from doing so.

Scene 15. Abu Bakr and his wife are having a discussion in a tent.

Abu Bakr: My daughter shall have the stars.

His wife: Is your Mohammed a child-molester? Our daughter has been a child. And he’s 55 years old.

Abu Bakr: He’s 53, not 55, and he has wealth and power. My daughter shall be his bride whether you say yes or no.

Scene 16. Mohammed drinks from a glass (probably wine) and holds a sword. Companion 1 and 2 are having a discussion in a low voice beside him.

Companion 2: Is the messenger of God - gay?

Companion 1: Yes, he is and Omar, also.

Man: I know about Omar, but he is the master Domant [?] was submissive

Mohammed: Do you remember the night of the jinn?

Companion 2, shakes his head, then: Of course, master.

Scene 17. Mohammed and a woman in a tent. Oriental music is played.

Mohammed: I do not know him. [he gropes her] You’re mine. You’re only for me. For you I’m cancelling the adoption. Islamic nation forbids adoption because of saying that. That is the next person in the Quran.

They kiss each other and have sex.

Scene 18. An old woman and two companions

Old Woman: My age has exceeded 120 years and in all my young life I have not seen such a murderous thug as Mohammed. He kills men, captures women and children, robs the caravans, breaches agreements and treaties. He sells the children as slaves after he and his men have used them. And what’s more, he does this all in the name of God. What God is this? That he’s such an oppressor and so unfair to the people.

Her feet are bound to two camels who run off; she is quartered. The companions laugh and the woman screams.

Scene 19. Mohammed sits with his companions.

Mohammed: Whoever refuses to follow Islam has only two choices; pay extortion or die.

Scene 20. Mohammed, older, sits in front of some treasure
Mohammed: Let us take the other treasure, cut off his arms and cut off his legs and then his head. And do it in front of his beautiful wife, Sophia.

All laugh.

Companion 1: As you command, master.

**Scene 21.** Mohammed, three companions. A prisoner (Prisoner) is tied up and his wife is held by companions.

Mohammed: I’d like to hear, what are the last words you would like to say to your wife?

Prisoner: Sophia, this is my will. God remembers the Jews and brings them together in the Holy Land. I hope that he won’t forget our bones and I wish Mohammed’s sons are given as a restitution for grandfather’s blood, for the rape of our women, for our children and our riches.

Sophia: Bkinana, Bkinana

Prisoner: I’m leaving so you are grieving

Sophia: No, no.

The prisoner is executed, a bloody sword. Oriental music. Sophia is brought to Mohammed.

**Scene 22.** Mohammed is in bed with a woman, another woman enters.

Mohammed: Hasa, please, do not yell! Aisha can hear you.

Hasa: Are you afraid from hearing me? If she doesn’t hear me tonight, I’ll make sure she knows of the scandal with my servant.

Mohammed: Please, Muhasa, don’t tell Aisha. I will make your father caliph of the Muslims.

She hits him with her shoe. A young woman enters and also hits him with her shoe.

Woman 4: Do you need help with him?

Hasa: I can handle him on my own. In my bed on my night […]. In my bed on my night.

Mohammed: The battle. I’m late for the battle, I have to go to the battle.

**Scene 23.** Mohammed gets dressed, leaves the tent. Cut. Mohammed has blood on his face. Oriental music.

Mohammed: Every non-Muslim is an infidel! Their lands, their women, their children are our spoils.

Fire, special effects.

1.2 The Background according to Western and Arab Media

As the reactions against “The Innocence of Muslims” gained momentum, the media
began to investigate the background of the video. The reports on Western and Arab media varied. Western media mostly mentioned Sam Bacile, also known as Nakoula Basseley Nakoula (Νικούλα Βάσιλη Νικούλα), Joseph Nasrallah (Ζούζη Νασρ Αλλά), Steve Klein, Morris Sadek (Μορίς Σαδίκ) and, to a lesser extent, Father Zakarya Botros (also Zakaria Butros or Zakaryā Buṭrus) and Terry Jones. In contrast, Arab media mostly focused on Mūrīs Ṣādiq, Terry Jones and ʿIsmat Zaqlama. The latter is not mentioned at all in Western media. This section will first analyse the background according to Western media and then the background as revealed in Arab media. Finally, the section will also look more closely at the people who produced this video.

As the protests in the Arab and Muslim world grew louder Western media started investigating the background to the video and revealed the involvement of five people; Sam Bacile – who was revealed to be Νικούλα Βάσιλη Νικούλα –, Ζούζη Νασρ Αλλά, Μορίς Σαδίκ, Steve Klein, Father Zakaryā Buṭrus, and Terry Jones. In addition, Western media traced the history of the video. At first, the name “Sam Bacile” emerged. In an interview with the Associated Press on 12 September 2012, “Sam Bacile” presented himself as an Israeli real estate agent living in California,5 who had received five million dollars from ‘Jewish donors’ to produce a film on Islam.6 Moreover, “Sam Bacile” described Islam as ‘a cancer.’7 However, the Associated Press soon discovered that “Sam Bacile” was in fact Νικούλα Βάσιλη Νικούλα, a 55-year-old Egyptian-born Coptic American8 with a criminal record. In 2010 he was sentenced to twenty-one months in prison and five years of supervised probation for having used fake identity cards and social security numbers to open credit accounts.9 However, Νικούλα Βάσιλη Νικούλα denied any responsibility, limiting his involvement to providing the logistics for the company producing the film.10 This production company was “Media for Christ,” a non-profit Evangelical organization run by Egyptian-born Ζούζη Νασρ Αλλά. In recent years Ζούζη Νασρ Αλλά has increasingly devoted himself to criticizing Islam.11 For instance, in 2010 he delivered a speech

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as an uninvited guest at a protest against the building of the so-called “Ground Zero mosque.” This protest was organized by Pamela Geller, a famous anti-Islam activist in the United States. In his speech, Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh issued a warning against Islam and Muslims who ‘came and conquered our country [Egypt] the same way they want to conquer America.” Alongside Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh, Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā also had connections to Mūrīs Ṣādiq, the leader of the National American Coptic Assembly, who is said to be close to ‘extremist Christians and Jewish circles.’ Mūrīs Ṣādiq’s role was to promote “The Innocence of Muslims” by sending it to an Arabic-speaking blog and posting it on his Twitter-account. On his Twitter-account the video was entitled “Muhammad, Messenger of Islam” and was described as showing the ‘true story of Muhammad, drawn from the Coran.’ The extremist priest Terry Jones likewise also promoted “The Innocence of Muslims.” In addition to these people, the Western media also revealed the name of Steve Klein, a Vietnam-veteran and anti-Islam activist. As part of his engagement against Islam, he established the group “Concerned citizens with the First Amendment” and demonstrated in front of mosques, thereby getting in touch with Christian Arabs, among them Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh and Mūrīs Ṣādiq. Unlike the Coptic Egyptians involved in the film, Steve Klein was more willing to talk to the media, and thus came to describe himself as a consultant for “The Innocence of Muslims.” Eventually, a few media outlets established a connection between these people and the controversial Coptic priest

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21 Blumenthal, Max. 13 September 2012. Inside the strange Hollywood scam that spread chaos across the Middle East. The Guardian.
Zakaryā Buṭrus, at least in terms of influence. The next section (1.3) will discuss to what extent the influence of Zakaryā Buṭrus on “The Innocence of Muslims” is evident.

Finally, with regards to the chronology of this video, the media discovered that it was shot in 2009 under the title “Desert Warriors” and produced by a “Sam Bassiel.” On 2 July 2012, an English trailer of the film was uploaded on YouTube on “Sam Bacil’s” channel; on 4 September 2012, it was dubbed into Arabic and published again on YouTube; on the next day Mūrīs Ţādiq added a link to this video in a message in which he announced with Terry Jones a mock trial of Muhammad on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

To sum up, the Western media established that Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā and Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh were involved in the production of this video, and Mūrīs Ţādiq in its promotion. Yet Steve Klein and Zakaryā Buṭrus seem to have played marginal roles. Noteworthy is the confusion for a few days about the identity of “Sam Bacile” and the alleged Jewish-Israeli background, before it was revealed that extremist Copts were mainly responsible for the production and promotion of this film.

However, when it comes to the Arab media, a brief overview suggests that the involvement of so-called “Copts in the diaspora” (aqbāṭ al-mahjar or “aqbat al-majgar”) had initially been established before a Jewish-Israeli background was suggested – the latter seemingly influenced by Western reports.

On 6 September 2012 the website Copts United reported that ʿIsmat Zaqlama, Mūrīs Ţādiq and Terry Jones had produced a film ‘offending’ Muhammad. With regards to this, al-Shurūq reported on 12 September that the “Higher Authority” of the self-ascribed “Coptic state” had published a statement under the leadership of ʿIsmat Zaqlama and Mūrīs Ţādiq, warning the ‘free world’ against Islam. In this statement they asserted that the Copts had a right to hate Muhammad given the history of persecution experienced by Copts under Islam. Thus, the statement cited various events, such as the Maspero massacre on 9 October 2011; the attacks in Naj’ Ḥammadī in January 2010 and in Alexandria in January 2011, as well as the conquest of Egypt by ʿAmr bin al-ʿĀs and the execution of thousands of young Copts by the ‘terrorist’ Šalāḥ al-Dīn for refusing to convert to Islam. This imaginary “Coptic state” was established by ʿIsmat Zaqlama, who emigrated to the United States in the 1970s. However, as the Western media

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started to focus on the background of “The Innocence of Muslims” and revealed the existence of a “Sam Bacile,” Arab media began to question the involvement of “Copts in the diaspora.” The Lebanese newspaper *al-Safir* wrote on 13 September 2012 that there were various speculations concerning the background of the video “The Innocence of Muslims” or “Muhammad, Messenger of the Muslims,” depending on the synchronization in Arabic. According to *al-Safir*, there were speculations concerning the involvement of Copts living in the United States or of Terry Jones, and concerning a connection to the film “Fitna” produced by the Dutch extremist politician Geert Wilders. Yet *al-Safir* concluded: ‘the truth is that Sam Bacile, a 54 year-old real estate agent from South California produced it.’ However, on 15 September 2012, the Palestinian newspaper *al-Quds* contradicted this assumption and reported, probably based on findings by Western media, that, contrary to suggestions made in previous reports, it was not Mūris Ṣādiq who was the producer of the film, but rather Sam Bacile. Yet after having entangled himself in contradictions, Sam Bacile was revealed to be a Coptic Egyptian who acted as “Sam Bacile” on YouTube. Additionally, *al-Quds* reported that an actress in the film, Cindy Garcia, had asserted that the film was manipulated. A trailer of the film was had been on YouTube for three months until it was synchronized into Arabic and spread on Arabic blogs, therefore drawing the attention of a wider audience. This assumption about the actual role of Mūris Ṣādiq had been corroborated a few days earlier by Mūris Ṣādiq himself. In an interview with Reuters, he defined his role as having promoted “The Innocence of Muslims” and not as having produced it. However, he insisted on the importance of the first part of the video which shows how Copts are allegedly being treated as second-class citizens in contemporary Egypt. Yet Mūris Ṣādiq did not see any offense in the depiction of Muhammad in the second part of the video. The responsibility of “Copts in the diaspora” was again asserted by *al-Ahrām* on 22 September 2012 in an article entitled “The Dark Triangle of the Production of the Film.” This alleged triangle was composed of Fr. Zakaryā Buṭrus, Īlī Bāsilī also known as Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā, and Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh (ibid). Zakaryā Buṭrus is described in this article

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31 *Al-Safir*. 13 September 2012.
32 *Al-Quds*. 15 September 2012.
33 *Al-Quds*. 15 September 2012.
34 *Al-Youm Al-Sabi*. 13 September 2012. المتمطَّف موريس صادق: الفيلم لم يهن الإسلام وهذه حقيقة أخطأنا ألقابنا. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/13/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%81_%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B3_%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%82_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B7%96%20V9oO25OfVJ (retrieved May 2, 2016).
35 *Al-Ahram*. 22 September 2012.
as having stirred ‘extremist thoughts’ and increased tensions between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the authorities in Cairo in the 1970s and 1980s (ibid). As a result, he was sent to Australia and then to the United States (ibid). In the United States, thanks to a ‘Protestant lady,’ he hosted a television show for some time in which he questioned the ‘Islamic creed’ (ibid). He continued his activities on the internet where he made contact with Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā (ibid). However, al-Ahrām denied the direct involvement of Zakaryā Buṭrus in the production of the film, although his influence in it is said to be pervasive (ibid). As for Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā, al-Ahrām described him as a ‘mysterious person’ and the writer and producer of the film. The third corner of this “black triangle” is Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh, described here as coming from a low-income family in Gizeh and directing the TV channel “The Way” (al-ṭariq) and the organization “Media for Christ” which produced the film (ibid). Arab media only dealt with the content of the video to a limited extent. According to al-Yawm al-Sābi‘, Muhammad was depicted as a ‘liar, womanizer, homosexual and bloody leader.’ Similarly, al-Quds reported that the video mocked Muhammad, his ‘sexual practices with men and children,’ cited the donkey as being the first Muslim animal, and accused Muhammad of killing children. Al-Quds also asserted that the video aimed to support Israel by showing the alleged true face of Islam. Eventually, even though the Arab media in general and especially the Egyptian media in particular had established the involvement of a few Copts living in the United States, the Palestinian newspaper al-Hayāt al-Jadīda continued to write that the film was produced by Sam Bacile, an ‘American citizen.’

As will be shown in the subsequent paragraphs, further research tends to balance out the image of Zakaryā Buṭrus, Mūrīs Ṣādiq and Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh as conveyed by the Arab media.

Zakaryā Buṭrus was born in 1934 in Egypt and is often described as a ‘Coptic televangelist’ (Elsässer 2014, 201). However, the critical reports about him mentioned above were balanced by the work of French scholar Laure Guirguis, for instance. She states that one of the main reasons for his having been sent to Australia was that Pope Shinūda III felt threatened by Buṭrus’ charisma and popularity when he was explicitly challenging the Islamist stream (Guirguis 2012, 134). Sebastian Elsässer likewise underlines his intense spirituality and style (Elsässer 2014, 201).

As for Mūrīs Ṣādiq, he applied for asylum in the United States in 2000, claiming that he

was under threat in Egypt. Mūris Śādiq has dealt with several controversial issues in Egypt and has used an equally controversial style: his promotion of a persecution discourse concerning Copts (Sedra 2007, 232), his numerous reports on the kidnapping of Christian girls by Muslims, and his call for international intervention in Egypt to protect Copts.

In contrast, Joseph Naṣr Allāh seems to have undergone a certain progression. For instance, in June 2011 in his first press release he expressed his support for the Coptic Orthodox Church’s refusal of Western interference in Egypt. Additionally, he criticised the denomination “aqbāṭ al-mahjar,” which he alleged cuts off Copts from their country, and he argued that there was no similar denomination for Egyptian Muslims living abroad (ibid).

Summary of Section 1.2

In brief, both the Western and Arab media established the involvement of a small and loose network of Copts living in the United States – Niqūlā Bāsīlī Niqūlā, Jūzīf Naṣrallāh and Mūris Śādiq –, who had some connection to American evangelical extremism – Terry Jones and Steve Klein –, all of whom were all more or less influenced by Zakaryā Buṭrus. However, the emergence of a “Sam Bacile” briefly raised questions about an “Israeli connection,” a theory which was quickly rejected. Despite this, it is unlikely that this speculation and its rejection had any impact on Christian and Muslim reactions in the countries we will analyse. In fact, some reactions continued to point at a “Jewish,” “Zionist” or “Israeli” background. One of the main questions in the next chapters will be how and to what extent the involvement of three to four Copts in the US was mentioned in these reactions.

1.3 “The Innocence of Muslims:” a Cliché of Anti-Islam Apologetics

Ever since Islam first appeared, it has drawn Christian scholars into defending

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42 Al-Youm Al-Sahi. 10 May 2011. موريس صادق يدعو لاحتلال مصر ويطالب باعتماد "القبطية" لغة رسمية. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2011/5/10/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B3_%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%82_%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88_%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1_%D9%88%D8%A8%B7%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A8%D8%A8%D8%AB%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%A9_%D8%A8%B9%D8%AA%D8%AB%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9/409140#.Vi9l5m5OfVJ (retrieved May 3, 2016).
43 Al-Youm Al-Sahi. 17 June 2011. رئيس قناة الطريق: المسيحيون ليسوا قلة ونطالب بالمشاركة السياسية للأقباط. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2011/6/17/%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3_%D9%82%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%AB1%D9%8A%D9%82_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86_%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A7_%D9%82%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A9_%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9/409140#.Vi915m5OfVJ (retrieved May 3, 2016).
Christianity against it and criticising Islam. The motivation for the development of Christian apologetics was the political and religious challenge posed by Islam (Hoyland 1997). Its key idea was that Islam is a worldly religion (Hoyland 1997, 543). These criticisms mostly focused on the character of Muhammad, and questioned the veracity of his prophecy. The video “The Innocence of Muslims” made use of this catalogue of clichés directed at Islam, while formulating the criticism in the context of contemporary Egypt. Thus, this section will first analyse the various references establishing the political context of the video, then the manipulations undertaken on the video. This section will then move on to deal with Zakaryā Buṭrus’ connection to this video before finally analysing the content of the second part of the video, i.e. the life and character of Muhammad.

Throughout “The Innocence of Muslims,” references to Egypt as a country of Christian-Muslim strife are made both implicitly and explicitly. The first part of the video shows present-day Egypt, in which the state participates in the alleged persecution of Copts by “Islamists.” The video tells the story of a – presumably Coptic – doctor who is dressed in a Western style. An “Islamist mob,” i.e. a group of men dressed in traditional Egyptian dress and wearing a head covering, attacks Copts and Coptic property while the police do not interfere. Subsequently, the Coptic physician comes home and tells his two daughters: ‘the Islamic Egyptian police arrested 1,400 Christians, tortured them and forced them to confess to the killings’ (Scene 3). When asked by his daughters what the cause for this assault is, the doctor takes a flip chart and writes the equation ‘Man plus “x” equals Islamic terrorism. Islamic terrorism minus “x” equals man.’ As for the meaning of “x,” the Coptic doctor tells his daughters: ‘You need to discover it for yourself.’ The video goes on to retrace the life of Muhammad from his birth to his conquests. Thus, throughout the first part of the video, explicit reference is made to Egypt.

In addition to this, the video appeals to the associations the audience would make when seeing men dressed in traditional dress or hearing the call to prayer when the assault starts. In contrast, the Christian identity of the doctor is established through his Western dress, the display of alcohol in his house, as well as a picture of Jesus Christ and a crucifix in his home. Furthermore, that this is an attack on Christians is made explicit by the cross a murdered woman wears around her neck (Scene 2). Apart from Christian and Islamic symbols, the video refers to Egypt several times. As stated above, the country seems to be an Islamic state here – ‘the Islamic Egyptian police’ is the phrase used by the doctor. Moreover, the police car is bearing an Egyptian flag. The second part of the video retracing the life of Muhammad likewise continues to refer to Egypt. Khadīja’s cousin, Bahira (who will be mentioned later on), is dressed like a Coptic cleric. Equally, an opponent of Muhammad asserts: ‘Before you were born even the
pharaohs of Egypt believed in one God – 5,000 years ago’ (Scene 16). All in all, throughout both parts of the video, references to Christianity, Islam and Egypt are made.

In addition to this, the English version of the video is proven to have been manipulated. On the one hand, names like Khadija, ʿĀʾisha, and ʿUmar seemed to have been part of the original video while on the other hand, every mention of Muhammad and the Quran were seemingly added later. These additions were apparently made by re-synchronising whole scenes. For instance, the sequences ‘Three men shake their swords and scream Mohammed is our Messenger and the Quran is our constitution!’ (Scene 11) (in reference to the slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood), and ‘Mohammed: Whoever refuses to follow Islam has only two choices, pay extortion or die’ (Scene 19) were subsequently added at a later point. In other instances, however, the additions were made within the script: ‘Mohammed: Haven’t you heard what God said in the Quran? A master may desire whom he wants and shall be given whom he wants’ (Scene 13); ‘The mother of ʿĀʾisha: Is your Mohammed a child-molester? Our daughter has been a child. And he’s 55 years old (Scene 15). These synchronizations are of poor quality.

As the controversy over “The Innocence of Muslims” arose, some media eventually connected it to Zakaryā Buṭrus. Yet, as was shown previously (Section 1.2), the priest was not directly involved in the production of the video. Still, “The Innocence of Muslims” seems to epitomize his criticisms directed at Islam, a position which will be demonstrated in the subsequent paragraph. For the time being, this paragraph will investigate Zakaryā Buṭrus’ connection to the video and the methodology he uses to criticize Islam. Following the controversy of “The Innocence of Muslims,” the Coptic priest published a statement on his website in which he asserted:

I, Fr. Zakaria have not been involved in any shape or form in the creation, production or finances of the provocative short-film the “Innocence of Muslims.” I have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the filmmakers and their organization. Any alleged links to the You-Tube sensation have been falsely fabricated to incite aggression towards a scapegoat.44

However, he admitted that the video was based on ‘Islamic books;’ therefore ‘[n]o one appreciates such provocative scenes, they are offensive and unnecessary, yet the real problem is that they are consistent with the story of Mohamed as revealed in the authoritative Islamic literature.’45 In the same way, he refuted the accusations of being an ‘extremist,’ since his alleged concern has always been to discuss the content of Islam. This discussion has been

undertaken by a method using ‘Islamic sources’ and eventually directing the discussion towards Christianity, like holding a mirror up to Islam. This procedure is applied in this very statement. His first step was to state his genuine wish to ‘stimulate spiritual, academic and calm discussions,’ while his second step was to reveal his actual purpose; ‘[i]n fact I want to encourage all people (Muslims or non-Muslims) to experience the love, freedom and peace that comes from knowing Jesus.’ In brief, Zakaryā Buṭrus combines an alleged scientific approach with a Christian equivalent to Islamic da’wa. Even though this procedure is not obvious in the case of “The Innocence of Muslims,” Fr. Zakariyā Buṭrus’ influence is visible throughout the second part of the video.

Christian apologists of Islam, among whom Zakaryā Buṭrus can be counted, have mainly formulated three parameters for the criticism of Islam; they have questioned the foundations of Muhammad’s revelation, the violence with which Islam was allegedly spread, and the sexuality of Muhammad and his companions. In the first place, the video questions the foundation of Muhammad’s revelation in different ways. Firstly, it mocks his origins by describing Muhammad as an illegitimate child. In this regard, the famous Christian apologist Bartholomew of Edessa (13th century) asserted that Muhammad was the son of a slave and an unknown father (Khoury 1972, 64). Moreover, the video suggests that Muhammad’s prophecy was phony by making his character say: ‘The inspiration has disappeared’ (Scene 9). This revelation is also questioned by emphasizing the role of Muhammad’s first wife, Khadīja. The video depicts the first time Muhammad had a revelation by putting the character between the legs of his wife, who asks him: ‘Do you still see [it]?’ (Scene 7). This so called “test by Khadīja” is evoked several times by Zakaryā Buṭrus. In one of his episodes, he listed all the Islamic biographies which mention this scene and concluded: ‘The numerous references to this story confirm its veracity.’ The role of Khadīja is also evoked by her asking her cousin, a priest, to help her. The priest, who is shown in the video as a Coptic cleric, replies: ‘I will help you, Khadija. I will make you a book for him. It will be a mix between some versions of the Torah and some versions of the New Testament and mix them into false verses’ (Scene 8). This Coptic priest represents the monk Bahira whose story has been recounted in many languages such as Syriac, Christian Arabic, and Armenian (Hoyland 1997, 476). Hence, the very nature of the Quran is questioned. Classical Christian apologetics accused Muhammad of having been in

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contact with “heretic” Christianity, especially with Assyrians and Arians (see Khoury 1972, 74).

In addition to the foundation of Muhammad’s revelation and prophecy, Christian apologists strongly criticized the violence reportedly used by Muhammad to spread Islam. This video deals with this violence at length. Firstly, it displays Muhammad as a ruthless warrior; ‘Mohammed: Killing the men, capturing the women, we shall loot the goods, the cats, any animals and anything else we find. [...] May you use whom you wish of the children. The rest shall be sold as slaves to buy more horses and swords’ (Scene 10). Particularly cruel is the torture of an old woman who denounces him for his violence and cruelty. She is subsequently attached to two camels and quartered. She is mentioned by Zakaryā Buṭrus in one of his episodes entitled “Muhammad confronted by the Great Principles of Ethics and the Murder of his Enemies.”

In addition to this seemingly random violence, the video aims to represent the systematic violence against anyone opposing the prophecy of Muhammad. In this regard, there seems to be a progression in the dealing with Non-Muslims or reticent Muslims: ‘Mohammed: it is not enough to believe in one God. You must say “God and Muhammad his Messenger.” Now, go, read the Quran. Move to Palestine or pay the extortion’ (Scene 14). Later on, this turns into ‘pay extortion or die’ (Scene 19). In the same way, the distinction between unbelievers on the one hand and Christians and Jews as belonging to the ahl al-kitāb on the other hand is no longer made. Instead, the video ends with Muhammad stating: ‘Every non-Muslim is an infidel!’ (Scene 23). Moreover, the video displays the execution of a captured Jewish man in front of his wife. In one of his episodes, Zakaryā Buṭrus mentioned the extermination of three Jewish tribes and the capture of the women and children by Muhammad. The Jewish tribe Banū Qurayza was indeed annihilated in 627, because the Jewish tribes refused to submit to the nascent Islamic state and hence threatened the cohesion of the fragile confederation Muhammad had managed to form (Noth 2004, 38). As for the other Jewish tribes, they were subject to heavy tributes (ibid). This outlining of Muhammad’s dealing with the Jewish tribes was subsequently understood by the Egyptian al-da wa al-salafiyya as proof of the alliance between the so-called Coptic diaspora and the ‘Zionist movement’ (see Section 2.3.1.2). However, it can be assumed that this scene aims to epitomize the fate of Non-Muslims, i.e. Jews and Christians, in majority Muslim countries as a result of Islam itself.

Lastly, the video also deals at length with the alleged sexual perversion of Muhammad, which ranges from paedophilia to homosexuality and uncontrolled lust (in sharp contrast to Western secular criticism of Islam). This sexual permissiveness allegedly promoted by Islam seriously dismayed early Christian apologists. John of Damascus (675-749) stated that the revelation actually served Muhammad’s sexual appetite (Khoury 1972, 88). To back this accusation, Christian apologists pointed to the Quran in which Muhammad is given a privilege over common Muslims in matters of marriage: ‘If she gives herself to the Prophet [and] if the Prophet wishes to marry her, [this is] only for you, excluding the [other] believers’ (33,55). Thus the video displays a woman who gives herself to Muhammad while her husband is away. Similarly, the video shows how Muhammad abolished adoption to enable him to have sex with a woman. This story was also mentioned by Zakaryā Buṭrus in his evocation of the story of Zaynab, the daughter-in-law of Muhammad’s adopted son. Eventually, the video outlines the case of Ā’isha, whom Muhammad married at the age of seven. In particular, the video ridicules Muhammad, by showing the jealousy of his other wives to whom Muhammad pleads: ‘I’m late for the battle’ (Scene 22). This emphasis on Muhammad and his companions’ sexual practices needs to be understood in the context of Oriental Christianity’s dismay at the alleged sexual permissiveness promoted by Islam. This theme was again epitomized in the thirteenth century chronicle The Martyrdom of John Phanijōit, which tells the story of a Copt converting to Islam in order to satisfy his desires. His return to Christianity and martyrdom is consequently pictured as a moral purification (Zaborowski 2005, 13).

To sum up, “The Innocence of Muslims” aimed to explain the oppression of Copts in contemporary Egypt through the use of the life and character of Muhammad and particularly denounced the foundations of the revelation, the systematic violence, and the sexual perversions of Muhammad and his companions.

**Conclusion to Chapter 1**

This chapter has shown that the video “The Innocence of Muslims” has to be understood in the context of a Coptic experience which resorts to Christian apologetics to understand the contemporary situation of Copts in Egypt. In doing so, the video entirely removes any historical context at the time of Muhammad as well as the content of his message (i.e. the strict monotheism). Therefore, in this case, criticizing Islam is denouncing the personality of Muhammad and accusing him of being cruel, sexually perverted, and an impostor.

Chapter 2 Egypt: An Averted Sectarian War?

Introduction

This chapter will first analyse the reactions of various religious, political, and civilian actors (2.1; 2.2; 2.3) then look at the protests (2.4) before finally examining the potential for a sectarian war (2.5). “The Innocence of Muslims” was a dangerous moment for the Copts in Egypt. Therefore, the first three sections will specifically look at how key actors and institutions in Egypt tried to prevent backlashes against Christians in Egypt.

Building a Modern State, Building a Nation

The rule of the Albanian commander in the Ottoman army, Muḥammad ʿAlī (1769-1805-1849), had a tremendous effect on Egypt. He established a highly centralised administration that was headed by a Turco-Circassian elite (Ibrahim 2013, 17) and implemented control over the whole country, controlling the whole process of agricultural production (Schölch 2004, 370) and the manufacturing industry (Schölch 2004, 371) as well as internal and external commerce (Schölch 2004, 372).

In this context, the state required a large amount of human resources including those such as the Copts who were better trained in accountancy and land surveying (Ibrahim 2013, 17). However, the attitude of the state towards the Copts also changed. Muḥammad ʿAlī himself said ‘Muslims and Christians are all our subjects. The question of religion has no connection to political considerations’ (Raheb 1995, 38). In addition, the Copts were allowed to ring church bells for the first time (Ibrahim 2013, 16) and the prescriptions on dress were abolished (Reiss 1998, 6). In 1831 equality was introduced (Reiss 1998, 6) and in 1855 the very symbol of Christians’ status as second-class subjects, the jizya, was abolished (Sedra 2007, 223).

Some Copts succeeded in benefitting from these developments and a Coptic landowning class emerged, especially in Upper Egypt (Elsässer 2014, 19). According to Vivian Ibrahim, in 1914 Copts controlled 50% of the wealth in Egypt but paid only 16% of the taxes on agriculture (Ibrahim 2013, 49). This new elite was able to assert its control over the church and in 1874 a Coptic Lay Council (al-majlis al-millī) was established to ensure lay control over Christian endowments (Ibrahim 2013, 117). The council was composed of twelve lay members and twelve deputies that were elected by general suffrage (Ibrahim 2013, 35). According to Laure Guirguis, however, this council institutionalized sectarianism (Guirguis 2012, 121). A group of reformists emerged from among this landed Coptic elite (Ibrahim 2013, 49) and in 1907 the
Coptic Reform Association was founded. It aimed to defend Coptic rights and access to education (Ibrahim 2013, 52-53).

The British occupation is often accused of having promoted “sectarianism” in Egypt by privileging Copts over Muslims. Vivian Ibrahim argues that the British press increasingly promoted the idea of a “Coptic question” in cases of violence and inequalities in Upper Egypt (Ibrahim 2013, 46). S.S. Hasan, on the other hand, reports on the dismay expressed by British sources at not being able to distinguish between Copts and Muslims, as both practiced circumcision, clitorectomy and even polygamy (Hasan 2003, 20). However, the general consul of Egypt, Lord Cromer, tended to promote the “shawwām” (Christians of Ottoman Syria), whom he called ‘the cream of the Near East’ (Philipp 1985, 99-100) and reportedly did not trust the Copts (Ibrahim 2013, 43).

In reaction to the British occupation from 1882 onward, a genuine Egyptian nationalism emerged that immediately made use of a religious dimension as a distinctive marker compared with the Turkish elite and British colonization, as Hamit Borzarslan argues (in Guirguis 2012, 53). At the same time, from that time on, a core issue was the struggle over who was a “true Egyptian.” In 1908, the newspaper *al-Watan* stated:


During the revolution of 1919 powerful symbols arose, such the first Coptic priest to preach in al-Azhar (Ibrahim 2013, 64). However, when it comes to the symbol of the crescent and the cross, Vivian Ibrahim notices that it was not to be found in photographs at that time (Ibrahim 2013, 60). In addition, Farīd Zahrān, a leading member of the Social Democratic Party, questioned the myths of this revolution stating that the presence of two Copts in the executive committee of the Nationalist Party did not mean that Copts played a significant role in the revolution (Zahran 2014). Following the revolution, there were discussions concerning the representation of minorities in parliament, but the Copts were against quotas (Reiss 1998, 40).

**Upheavals: A New Role for the Church**

Throughout the second part of the twentieth century, a number of external and internal developments led to an increased assertion of the political role of the Coptic (Orthodox) Church and resulted in an increasing political tutelage of Christian Egyptians by the Church. However, the latter continued to be politically active, independent of the church and even in opposition to it.
On an external level, i.e. external to the Christian community, Egypt has experienced far-reaching demographical, social, economic, and political developments throughout the twentieth century, all of which have affected both the situation of the Copts and Christian-Muslim relations. For instance, migration to the cities contributed to the appearance of a Coptic presence in regions where there was none previously, such as in the Sinai and the Suez (Reiss 2013, 19). In Cairo, Copts mainly migrated to the suburb of Shubrā al-Khayma where there was no church until 1926 (Reiss 1998, 81). Similarly, in the 1930s the suburb of Gizeh had only one church (Reiss 1998, 98). Following the Revolution of 1952, the regime of the Free Officers and that of Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir introduced economic and agrarian reforms aimed at breaking the power of the former elite, amongst them the Coptic landowners. In addition, Nasser abolished the Coptic Lay Council (al-majlis al-millī) (Sedra 2012b).

As a result, the long conflict between the church and lay notables for supremacy in the Coptic community was resolved to the benefit of the church. This new relationship between Nāṣir and the Coptic Patriarch, Kyrillos VI, was termed “millett”-partnership. In addition, large parts of the economy and of the media began to be controlled by the state.

Yet the defeat of 1967 marked a new inflection towards a stronger Islamization of society. Both the “re-Islamization” and the “re-Christianization” which will be analysed below, contributed to a growing estrangement between Copts and Muslims. Both the Islamist stream and the church acted against popular religion. As a result, Muslims no longer participated in Coptic pilgrimage (Voile 2004, 243). Similarly, on a political level, both Anwar al-Sādāt and Ḥusnī Mubārak tended towards greater “Islamization.” While this led to a temporary break between al-Sādāt and Pope Shinūda III, the latter and Mubārak seemed to re-establish the “millett”-partnership. Yet under the presidency of Ḥusnī Mubārak, teachers, social workers, and preachers with an “Islamic outlook” were massively recruited in the ministries of education, social affairs and Islamic endowments (Roussillon 1994, 106-107).

Attempts at renewals in the Coptic Orthodox Church started in the mid-nineteenth century but reached their climax under the patriarchate of Shinūda III, who institutionalized the Sunday School Movement (Bishoy, Metropolitan 2005, 775). This renewal marked a tradition that was cleaned of its “foreign” – Latin, Greek, Islamic – influences (Mayeur-Jaouen 2005, 363). It aimed to re-Christianize the Christians in a similar fashion as Islamism re-Islamized Muslims, by establishing the church as the only moral, historical, and pedagogic framework (el-Khawaga 1992, 47-48). The reform encompassed a reorganization and centralization of the dioceses and a revival of monasticism (see Reiss 1998, 179). For instance, in 1844 there were

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52 It was re-established in 1973 and drew its members from the middle-class.
twelve dioceses, in 1971 there were seventeen, and in 2009 there were 47 dioceses (Elsässer 2014, 52-55; Bishoy 2005, 790). Bigger dioceses were divided into smaller ones. Before the accession of Shinūda III, the Holy Synod comprised twenty-three members; that number has now reached eighty-three (Reiss 1998, 273). In addition, social services such as kindergarten and evening schools were introduced (Hasan 2003, 184) and the creation of Coptic student associations (usar) was promoted by the newly established Bishopric for Youth (Guirguis 2012, 46). All these measures aimed to fully assimilate the Coptic community and Coptic youth into the church (Hasan 2003, 184) but, according to Laure Guirguis, Shinūda III also contributed to the creation of a sense of minority (Guirguis 2012, 112). In addition, these measures also faced resistance. Likely under pressure from President al-Nāṣir, Pope Kīrillus VI opposed the political character of the Sunday School Movement (Sedra 2007, 225). This movement was the product of a newly urbanized middle-class in Cairo and faced opposition from the rural population of Upper Egypt (Mayeur-Jaouen 2005, 363). The actors of the Sunday School Movement managed to enter the revived monasteries and, from there, to become a leading force in the patriarchate. All in all, the reform turned the patriarchate into an increasingly opaque (Sedra 2012a) and authoritarian institution. Shinūda III seems to have especially contributed to this development. Interestingly, he developed powerful and sometimes questionable means with which to pressure the government. Following the violent clashes between the police and Coptic protesters in November 2010, Shinūda III retreated to the monasteries of the Wādī al-Naṭrūn to obtain the release of 133 imprisoned Copts.53

The Revolution: Emancipation from Church Tutelage

Overall, the Revolution of 25 January 2011 did not start that day but was the final result of a long series of growing protests against the regime of Ḥusnī Mubārak. It was a revolution against authoritarian and corrupted institutions which had also affected the Copts. Their involvement in the revolution was also a revolt against the church tutelage (see Section 2.3.3). Despite the patriarch’s calls on Copts not to participate in the protests, some youths did participate. This involvement signalled their intention to participate both as Egyptians and as Copts, and to be visible as Copts. Several protests supporting the victims of the attack on the Coptic church in Alexandria took place in Tahrir Square, as did prayers in Coptic and in Arabic.54 Interestingly, however, churches in Egypt officially expressed their opposition to this

revolution until after the fall of Mubārak. As the Coptic Orthodox bishop of Shubrā al-Khayma, Murquṣ, stated: ‘We do not know the goal of these protests, nor the details, nor who is behind it’ (POC 2011, 399). Finally, the Coptic Orthodox Church issued a statement praising the ‘revolution of the youth’ on 15 February, one day after the departure of Mubārak. In this regard, the different attitudes displayed by the churches are interesting. After the revolution, Shinūda III continued to express his fears by listing all the assaults on Copts and churches in the newspaper he edited, al-Kirāza. In contrast, not only did the Coptic Catholic bishop Qutla participate in the protests, in civilian clothes (Reiss 2013, 30), but the magazine issued by this church, al-Ṣalāḥ, criticized the ‘production of fear’ in several articles, for instance in connection to the reportedly high figure of Coptic emigration following the revolution, allegedly aimed at emptying Egypt of its Copts. Subsequently, however, church leaders told another story about the Arab Spring. In an interview, Bishop Murquṣ, whose stance was mentioned above, alluded to Shinūda III’s fear that the revolution would lead to a take-over by the ‘Islamists,’ but he recalled the opposition of the bishops to the patriarch’s position. Similarly, the Coptic Catholic patriarch Anṭūnyūs Naguīb later expressed his praise of the revolution, which ‘revealed a new image of the Christians; full of energy, boldness, perseverance.’

The aftermath of the revolution led to a gradual break between Shinūda III and young Copts, whose premises were visible before the revolution. As the assaults on Copts continued after the revolution, Maspero Square in Cairo developed into an alternative Tahrir Square for Coptic grievances. The patriarch called on the protesters to go home. On the evening of 9 October 2010, security forces finally attacked the protesters, the majority of whom were Copts, killing twenty-eight people and wounding over two hundred (Younis 2011). While the assault took place, state media called on the people to defend the army (ibid). The statement issued by the Coptic Orthodox Church the following day seems to reflect the official discourse:

We insist on our Christian faith not using violence in any of its forms. As we do not forget that some foreigners have lurked among our sons and committed the errors that were connected to

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them [...]. The Holy Synod calls on the Coptic people for a three-day prayer and fast starting tomorrow.60

Yet despite the patriarchal calls, a march on the fortieth day after the massacre was not cancelled and went from St. Mark’s Cathedral in al-ʿAbāssiya to Tahrir Square.61 During the Christmas mass in January 2012, when the patriarch wanted to thank the representatives of the SCAF present there, young Copts protested.62

Following the death of Shinūda III in March 2012, the lead was taken by Bishop Bākhūmyūs who tried to reduce the political role of the church. For the presidential elections in June 2012, the Coptic Orthodox church announced that it would remain neutral towards all candidates and would punish priests that expressed their support for any of the candidates.63 Similarly, at his enthroning ceremony, Pope Tawāḍrūs II, expressed the wish for a non-political church: ‘The most important thing is for the church to go back and live consistently within spiritual boundaries because this is its main work; spiritual work.’64

However, external factors again played a role in defining the place of the church in Coptic society. Firstly, the new government and presidency under the Muslim Brotherhood did not cease to consider the Copts a homogenous minority under the tutelage of the church. In addition, in November 2012, when Muḥammad Mursī declared his decisions immune (see below), opposition to his leadership increased and the church felt increasingly compelled to react. In April 2013, St. Mark’s Cathedral, the see of the Coptic Orthodox Church, was attacked by unknown people.65

**The Rule of the Muslim Brotherhood**

In the aftermath of the revolution, Islamist forces dominated politically. Yet a competition emerged between the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi forces. The greatest surprise at the Parliamentary elections in 2011/2012 was the success of the Nur Party and its alliance. The Nur Party won 111 seats; the Building and Development Party (ḥizb al-bināʾ wa l-tanmiya),...
the political arm of al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya, thirteen seats; and ḥizb al-aṣāla (Party of Authenticity) three seats (Lacroix 2012). In addition, Islamist forces dominated the Shura Council of the Parliament. The Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, controlled 56% of the seats, the Nur Party 25%, and the secular forces barely over 10%. 66 Furthermore, in the constituent assembly, the Muslim Brotherhood controlled half of the seats and Salafi forces 12 seats out of 50. 67 As a result, even before the election of Muḥammad Mursī, the Muslim Brotherhood was repeatedly accused of “brotherhoodization.” In particular, the Nur Party expressed significant criticism towards the organization and asserted in February 2013 that the Muslim Brotherhood controlled 1,300 key positions in the state institutions. 68 In addition, Al-Ahram Hebdo reported that at that time, five of the twenty-seven governorates were led by members of the Muslim Brotherhood and five vice-governors (ibid). The Muslim Brotherhood was also ‘massively’ present in the institutions of human rights organizations, of the press, and of Islamic affairs (ibid). In November 2012, Muḥammad Mursī declared his presidential decrees immune against any juridical prosecution and immunized the constituent assembly. 69 In early November 2012, just one day before the Pope Tawāḍrūs II was enthroned, the representatives of the church withdrew from the constituent assembly (Casper 2012c). Kārim Raḍwān, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood (whose reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims” will be mentioned later on), justified this measures as follows: ‘Brotherhoodization is a legitimate procedure the Brothers will not renounce.’ 70

The Issue of “Sectarian Violence”

Since the issue of attacks on Copts is a main, if not the main issue of the video “The Innocence of Muslims,” an entire section is dedicated to this subject. Such attacks are said to have begun in 1972 when an illegal church in Khanka was attacked by Muslims and one hundred priests protested in reaction, marking the beginning of clashes on grounds of church building (Reiss 1998, 289). However, Vivian Ibrahim and Sebastian Elsässer note that there had already been attacks on Copts in the 1950s and 1960s (Ibrahim 2013, 159; Elsässer 2014, 68). The politician Farīd Zahrān, mentioned above, even asserts that ‘Sectarian strife […] by some historians and intellectuals to be the largest and most important example of strife in

Egypt’s modern history, exploded between 1908-1918’ (Zahran 2014). In this article he also roundly criticises the attitude towards such “sectarian violence:”

This opacity and blindness to what is considered by some to be very dark times in history is part of an Egyptian tradition that does not see the shame in the incident itself but rather in the people knowing that something negative occurred […] we try to cover up the strife and insist that things are “just fine”, and that colonialism, Israel, the Crusades, communism, imperialism, or maybe even the country, is the reason for the strife, and that all Egyptians are one people cut of one fabric… to some extent this rhetoric is not correct, or rather, inaccurate.

Such events of “sectarian strife” seem to have significantly increased in the years before the Revolution of 25 January 2011 and mainly resulted from conflicts over marriage, land and the disappearance of young Coptic women. The cases of Camilla Shehata and Wafaa Constantine in 2010 in particular attracted the most attention. Both were married to priests and seemingly converted to Islam in order to escape abusive marriages. Yet their whereabouts were unknown and it stirred the anger of Islamist radicals. However, the alleged forceful conversion and/or kidnap of Coptic women often results from the women’s own desire to escape stifling and dominant family structures (see Guirguis 2012, 75-81).

The way the official authorities and the media have dealt with such issues has shown both an eagerness for sensationalism and a taboo. On the one hand, the liberalization of the media in 2005 resulted in a more open discussion of inter-religious relations and clashes. As Elizabeth Iskander showed, this became a “hot topic” that increased sales, while still covering the issue in the context of national unity (Iskander 2012, 32-33). On the other hand, political and official sources, both Christian and Islamic, resort to denial and to promoting discourses of national unity (Guirguis 2012, 42-44). For instance, following the killing of six people leaving Christmas mass in January 2010 in Nag’ Ḥammādi, the bishop of the diocese, Kirillus refused to testify against the instigator of this attack, a former member of parliament from Mubarak’s Mubarak. In general, such attacks on Copts or the destruction of churches are often ascribed to the mental illness of the offender or to a conspiracy from abroad (Shenoda 2011). Instead of a fair prosecution, peace gatherings take place between the victim and the offender in which the victim usually has to forgive the offender (Shenoda 2011). In this regard, the journalist Youssef Sidhom rejects the very idea of “sectarian sedition” (fitna fa’ifiyya) as it places the victim and the offender on the same level (Sidhom 2011).

71 However, the media seem to arbitrarily report on such events. For instance, the media did not report on the clashes between a Coptic family and a Muslim family in a village in the al-Minyā Governorate just after the revolution which resulted in the death of eleven Copts. In Al-Shuruq. 10 September 2012.

72 Ahram Online. 18 November 2012. Church-state relations yet to change in Morsi’s Egypt.
Following the Revolution, there was hope that such attacks would stop (Guirguis 2012, 23). However, throughout 2011 and 2012 attacks on churches and Copts continued. Under the rule of the SCAF, a church was burnt in the Hilwān (southern Cairo) (and subsequently rebuilt) (Shenoda 2011). Also, in March 2013, there were violent clashes in al-Muqaṭṭam (ibid). In May 2011, rumours about a woman having converted and being detained in a church provoked the anger of Salafis in Imbaba, in Gizeh (ibid). There are various figures regarding the numbers of churches burnt, the number of deaths and people injured. According to Antony Shunouda, two churches, ten homes, and thirteen stores were burnt, twelve people were killed and 238 were injured (Shenoda 2011). Youssef Sidhom reported that these attacks were foreseeable but that the police did not intervene to prevent them (Sidhom 2011). Ironically, the priest of a church that was burnt in Imbaba, participated in a protest against “The Innocence of Muslims” (see Section 2.4.2). In summer 2012, there were attacks in Dashshūr (Gizeh governorate), in Asyūţ (Upper Egypt), in Rafaḥ (Sinai), and Copts had to temporarily leave their homes (POC 2013, 170-171). Yet, during his visit to the United Nations, Muḥammad Mursī denied the existence of such problems and of discrimination against Copts (Sidhom 2012).

2.1.1 The Churches

This first section will analyze the reactions to the film by means of official statements, speeches at joint Christian-Muslim conferences, and comments reported by the media. These reactions are those of both official and non-official churches in Egypt; the Coptic Orthodox Church (2.1.1.1), the Coptic Catholic Church (2.1.1.2), the Evangelical Church (2.1.1.3), the Episcopal Church (2.1.1.4), and non-recognized Churches (Baptist, Adventist) (2.1.1.5). This section will pay particular attention to the motivation behind these reactions and the strategies of condemnation.

2.1.1.1 The Coptic Orthodox Church

On the whole, the official reactions of the Coptic Orthodox Church reflect the attempt to dissociate the Church and the Copts from “The Innocence of Muslims.” In this regard, the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church gathered twice to issue a statement condemning the film; the first time on 9 September 2012 and the second time on 12 September 2012, probably following the thwarted storming of the US embassy in Cairo. In addition, on 22

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73 The Holy Synod gathered a third time on September 21 for an urgent meeting to counter the accusations made by the Salafi Front. See Section 2.5.2.
September 2012, Bishop Bākhūmyūs weighed in again to emphasize the condemnation emanating from the Church.

The two statements issued by the Holy Synod display a certain progression in terms of clarification of its position. The first statement was issued on 9 September 2012 in the name of the Church, the Holy Synod, and the Coptic Orthodox Lay Council (*majlis millī*) and was signed by Bishop Bākhūmyūs, the bishop of Sūhāg and the then provisional patriarch. It does not refer to “The Innocence of Muslims” by its title, but instead uses other terms such as ‘an offense (*isāʾa*)’ and ‘a crime’ that needs to be punished, ‘violating their feelings [of Muslims], their creeds and their religious symbols.’ Interestingly, Muhammad is described here as a “religious symbol.” However, it is not clear what this offense and crime are about. Instead, the statement uses more circumlocutions: ‘the Church has learnt that some Egyptians living in foreign countries (*duwal al-mahjar*) work on spreading disunion (*tafarruqa*) between the sons of the united nation (*abnāʾ al-wāṭan al-wāḥid*) by offending (*isāʾa*) Islam and its noble prophet (*al-nabī al-karīm*).’ Thus, the Church silences the specific involvement of Copts and instead invokes the responsibility of ‘some Egyptians.’ Moreover, the statement expresses both explicitly (in the case of the Church) and implicitly (in the case of the Copts) respect for ‘Islam, the Muslims, and the partners of the nation (*waṭan*) and humanity.’ In addition, the Church criticizes the video by stating that it contradicts Christian teachings and explicitly ‘distances’ itself from this.

Following the attempted assault on the US embassy in Cairo on September 11, the Holy Synod gathered anew on 12 September 2012. In a statement composed of six points, it repeated its condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims.” This time, however, the statement uses a more specific language; ‘the production, the showing or [the] promotion of this offending film.’ Furthermore, the background of the video is mentioned more clearly, albeit implicitly; ‘Copts of the diaspora who belong to the Church have already expressed their harsh resentment’ and ‘this statement is the honest expression of the feelings of the Copts in Egypt and outside [of the country].’ Thus, the Church attempts to avoid any generalization between the Copts and “The Innocence of Muslims” and establishes itself in this context as the sole legitimate spokesman of the Christians of Egypt. In contrast, the Holy Synod refers to a few arguments

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75 علمت الكنيسة أن بعض المصريين المقيمين في دول المهجر يعملون على نشر الفرق بين أبناء الوطن الواحد والإساءة إلى الإسلام ونبيه. “ال الكريم”

76 الإسلام والمسلمين وشركاء الوطن والإنسانية.

made in the first statement; the unequivocal condemnation of the ‘offense’ embodied in the film, the contradiction with ‘Christian values and the teachings of the Lord Christ,’ ‘despising (izdirāʾ) religion and offending (isāʾa) its symbols is a crime’ which requires examination, and solidarity with Muslims: ‘Islam and Muslims are partners in the nation (waṭan) and humanity.’ Thus this statement more clearly underlines the dimensions of national unity than the first one; ‘this is the noble origin of the Egyptian people and its unity – Muslims and Christians – which will overcome this test by a joint expression of collective rejection on all levels.’ Eventually, it is mentioned that a copy of this statement was sent to shaykh al-Azhār Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib and President Muhammad Mursī, a fact which stresses the awareness of a potential threat for Christians in Egypt.

In addition to these two statements issued by the Holy Synod, Bishop Bākhūmyūs addressed a special declaration to al-Ahrām on 22 September 2012 in his capacity as head of the Coptic Orthodox Church. In his declaration to al-Ahrām, Bishop Bākhūmyūs began by repeating the Church’s condemnation of this video and its solidarity with Muslims; ‘I say to our Muslim brothers that we do not agree with the offense of any religious symbol.’ However, he went on to harshly condemn the ‘disgraceful act’ of the burning of the Bible (here injīl) by “Abū Islām” as a result of the backlash against Christians. In doing so, Bishop Bākhūmyūs used the discourse of national unity: ‘this does not serve our religious and national causes.’ Quite interestingly, in appealing to ‘political and religious forces’ to take the necessary measures to prevent new backlashes against Christians and Christianity, he “Islamized” Christianity to some extent: ‘to stop these attacks on religions, their symbols, their sacred items (muqaddasāt) and their revealed books (kutubihā al-samāwiyya).’ In short, the Bible, especially the Gospel, was defined as “revealed books” like the Quran, which is not quite accurate. It can be suggested that in doing so, Bishop Bākhūmyūs was attempting to make the Bible worthy of respect and protect it from Islamist and Salafi forces.

In consequence, it seems that under pressure from the events and reactions in Egypt, which will be analyzed subsequently, the highest level of the Coptic Orthodox Church repeated its position and put forward more or less the same arguments. Its main goal was to distance both the Church and the Copts from “The Innocence of Muslims” and to avoid any backlash. In doing so, it made use of theological arguments and the national discourse.

In this paragraph, we will look at how the Egyptian media mentioned the official

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78 Anbā Bākhūmyūs was consecrated bishop of Sūhāg, in Upper Egypt in 1986 (Meinardus 2006, 43). He has been a key actor in the Sunday School Movement and opened more than 50 literary classes, some of which he directed himself (Hassan 2003, 139).
reactions by the Coptic Orthodox Church. Prior to the first Holy Synod on September 9, al-Yawm al-Sābi’ seemed to have contacted representatives of three Churches in Egypt to ask them about the position of their Churches on “The Innocence of Muslims.” In the case of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Bishop Murquṣ, the bishop of Shubrā al-Khayma, a northern middle-class suburb of Cairo, was quoted as having said ‘he rejected’ this video. Both Bishop Murquṣ and Ṣafwat al-Biyāḏī, the representative of the Evangelical Church in Egypt, stated that it contradicted ‘Christian teachings.’ In addition, Ṣafwat al-Biyāḏī and Father Rafīq Garīsh, the spokesman of the Coptic Catholic Church, emphasized that Christians in Egypt were not responsible for this. These positions were quoted following al-Yawm al-Sābi’’s mention of ‘a number of Copts in the diaspora [who] produced a film offending Islam and the prophet Muhammad (PBUH)’ (for further details see Section 2.5.1). Moreover, the first statement issued by the Orthodox Holy Synod was mentioned as ‘the Orthodox Church announced on Monday in an official statement issued by anbā Bākhūmyūs, the transitional patriarch’ which is correct. 

Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm then went on, however, to assert that the Holy Synod described the producers of the video as ‘extremists,’ which it did not. In another instance, al-Ahrām correctly described anbā Bākhūmyūs as the ‘qā’im maqām al-baṭriyark’ (which can be translated as “provisional patriarch”), and provided the background to the second statement as ‘the Holy Synod the Orthodox Church yesterday issued a statement after a meeting.’ Obviously, Watānī correctly mentions ‘the Holy Synod under the leadership of anbā Bākhūmyūs, provisional patriarch (qā’im maqām al-baṭriyark), issued a statement.’ All in all, the media put the emphasis on the harsh condemnation and dissociation expressed by the Church and quoted two main arguments in particular; solidarity with Muslims and the contradiction of Christian principles. The consideration of Muslims ‘partners in the nation and humanity’ was particularly referred to in several instances; al-Maṣrī al-Yawm on 11 September 2012, al-Shuruq on 11 September 2012.

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79 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 8 September 2012. DOI: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/8/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B3_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9_%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6_%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7_%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%89%D8%A1_%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%84_%D9%88%D9%88%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86_%D8%85%D9%86/7790028.VJHyq250fVJ (retrieved May 21, 2016).


81 Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.


Equally esteemed was the idea of “abnāʾ al-waṭan al-wāḥid,” may it be ‘a high offense for Islam, his noble prophet and the sons of the united nation’ in al-Ahrām on September 11,86 or ‘spreading division between the sons of the one united nation’ in Waṭanī on September 16.87 Moreover, the idea that “The Innocence of Muslims” contradicted basic Christian principles was quoted several times; al-Maṣrī al-Yawm in September 11,88 al-Shuruq on September 11,89 al-Ahrām on September 13,90 Waṭanī on September 16.91 In addition, the background was mentioned to differing degrees; al-Ahrām on September 13 ‘part of a Western attack,’92 Waṭanī on September 16 ‘Copts in the diaspora belonging to the Church expressed their resentment’93 and ‘those who produced or promoted the offending film’ or ‘some living in foreign countries.’94

Subsequently, a number of Coptic Orthodox bishops reacted to “The Innocence of Muslims” using various means of expression such as statements, conferences and others. With regards to these reactions, a significant question, again, is the issue of motivation. Yet we will also investigate whether the bishops referred to some of the aspects of the two official statements by the Holy Synod: whether they repeated them, developed them, or added new arguments. First of all, the reactions expressed via official statements will be analyzed and then we will look at the speeches delivered in conference and lastly, at the reactions that were expressed by other means. Hence, another core issue is the question of whether the context in which the reaction was expressed influenced the content and the language of the reaction.

To begin with, Bishop Mūsā (Youth), Bishop Ārāmyā (Coptic Orthodox Cultural Center), Bishop Tādrus (Port Said), Bishop Mīkhāʾīl (Asyūṭ), Bishop Būlā (Ṭanṭa), and Bishop Athanāsyūs (Banī Mazār) issued official statements.
Bishop Mūsā⁹⁵ published two statements; the first was published on September 11 on the website of Copts Today, the second on September 13. In his first hand-written statement,⁹⁶ Bishop Mūsā did not evoke the video by its title but instead spoke of ‘an offense,’ ‘the offense against religion and its symbols,’ ‘the offense against Islam and its Messenger.’ Thus, he made use of the argument put forward by the Holy Synod that “The Innocence of Muslims” is an ‘offense.’ However, Bishop Mūsā dealt more explicitly with the background of this ‘offense,’ ascribing it to ‘a small deviant group’ made of ‘some Copts living abroad’ and Terry Jones. Moreover, he quoted Pope Shinūda III who reportedly said to the “Coptic diaspora” ‘You harm Egypt and all Copts.’ Hence, Bishop Mūsā undermined the efforts undertaken by the Holy Synod to remain as vague as possible on the background and to dissociate the Copts in the diaspora from the group which produced the film. Additionally, Bishop Mūsā argued that the video contradicted Christian principles by quoting the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians 4:29 ‘Let no evil talk come out of your mouths,’⁹⁷ but more importantly, he underlined that ‘our Coptism (qibṭiyyatunā) [underlined by the author] teaches us the preservation of the feelings of our partners in the nation.’ Lastly, he thanked the Muslims for protesting against the video with ‘their Christian brothers.’ This means that, according to Bishop Mūsā, this Coptic identity is one which goes beyond a mere belonging to the Christian religion and encompasses the idea of an original Egyptian attachment. Moreover, it is not dissociable from solidarity with Egyptian Muslims. This first statement seemingly attracted a number of criticisms, as the bishop published another statement a few days later⁹⁸ in which he repeated his earlier reaction, but spoke this time in the first person singular and dealt more precisely with his quotation of Pope Shinūda. In particular, he repeated the rejection of this video by ‘us all, Christians and Copts, because the Lord Christ taught us respect for the religions and human beings, and our Coptism teaches us the preservation of the feelings of our brothers in the nation (waṭan).’ As to his quotation of Pope Shinūda criticizing the attitude of Copts in the diaspora, Bishop Mūsā asserted that he had witnessed the late patriarch saying: ‘You harm Egypt and all Copts.’

On September 17, al-Ahrām quoted Bishop Ārāmyā’s reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims.” He is the president of the Coptic Orthodox Center and of the monastery of the Black

⁹⁵ Like Bishop Bākhūmyūs and Bishop Binyāmīn (Minūfiyya), Bishop Mūsā was close to Patriarch Shinūda III (Hassan 2003, 116). He was consecrated as bishop of the youth in 1980, a newly established bishopric (Reiss 2013, 8). A physician by training, he is very popular and is currently sick (Guirguis 2012, 182).
Father Moses as well as being the former secretary of Pope Shinūda. The circumstances under which the bishop expressed his view are not clear, as al-Ahrām simply wrote: ‘he insisted.’ Bishop Ārāmyā stated that ‘Christianity does not offend others and does not accept offense,’ like Jesus Christ ‘said in his sermons on the mountain.’

In contrast, the formulation of the reaction of the diocese of Port Said under Bishop Tādrus seems to have been more considered. Under his leadership, the clerics of the diocese gathered together and issued a statement which was published on Gate al-Ahrām on September 12. In this statement, ‘the bishop emphasizes that the Church of Port Said’ viewed the video as ‘immoral’ and ‘cowardly,’ as an offense (‘those who offended’) to the ‘person of’ Muhammad and the ‘feelings of Muslims in the world.’ Interestingly, Muhammad was not ascribed to religious symbols/figures (rumūz) or designated in his quality as prophet or messenger but as a person against whom the offense was directed. As to the background of this video, the statement did admit the involvement of ‘some Coptic Egyptians in the diaspora (ba’d al-aqbāṭ fī al-khārijij),’ but denied their representativeness, as it does not ‘agree with the tolerant Christian teachings.’ In addition, the diocese views this video in the context of the new democracy in Egypt, aimed at stirring up ‘a battle (waqīʿa) between the Muslims and Copts of Egypt.’ Yet according to the diocese, this attempt is doomed to fail because of the ‘awareness of the people of Egypt and the love that has connected the Muslims and Copts of Egypt for fourteen centuries.’ In short, the statement expresses a belief in the strength of national unity in Egypt.

In slight contrast, Bishop Mīkhāʾīl, bishop of Asyūṭ, repeated the content of the two official church statements and seemed to develop them further. In his press declaration published on September 12, he also viewed “The Innocence of Muslims” as an ‘offense’ targeting the ‘Islamic religion and its noble Messenger (rasūlihi al-karīm)’ as well as an ‘excuse for sectarian strife (fitnātāʾifiyya).’ He underlined the Church’s respect for the ‘feelings of our Muslim brothers, partners in this dear nation (waṭan).’ Yet, unlike the official statements, he emphasized that Copts condemned the ‘film’ before Muslims did.

On 15 September 2012, al-Shurūq al-Jadīda published the reaction given by Bishop

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100 Bishop Tādrus was consecrated Bishop of Port Said, a newly established diocese, in 1976 (Meinardus 2006, 42).
102 Bishop Mīkhāʾīl was consecrated in 1946 (Meinardus 2006, 38) and was viewed for some time as a traitor following his telegram sent to President Anwar al-Sādāt expressing his support when the president was attempting to reconcile with Islamist forces (S.S. Hassan 2003, 114).
Athanāsyūs, of Banī Mazār in Upper Egypt. In this statement he did not mention the involvement of Copts in the diaspora at all, but instead only evokes Terry Jones, whom he described as a ‘another supporter of strife.’ He also suggested that Christianity had been likewise targeted and mentioned the film *The Da Vinci Code*, which will be mentioned below (see summary to Section 2.1.1.1). According to Bishop Athanāsyūs, both *The Da Vinci Code* and this video shared the same goal; ‘a battle (waqīʿa) between humanity.’ However, both attempts were condemned to fail, since ‘Muslims and Christians in Egypt experienced a common national position and have been united across time.’ Thus national unity is given a historical foundation.

Lastly in the statements category, the diocese of Ṭanṭa, in Lower Egypt, issued two statements. In addition, its bishop, anbā Būlā, initiated a joint Christian-Muslim conference (which will be mentioned in Section 2.4). *Al-Sharq al-ʿArabī* published a statement issued by the priests of the diocese on September 13, and *al-Ahrām* mentioned on September 14 that the diocese had gathered to issue a statement. It is possible that both newspapers are referring to the same event. However, the content of the reports differs to some extent. *Al-Sharq al-ʿArabī* quoted or paraphrased from the statement issued in the name of the priests of the diocese, who described “The Innocence of Muslims” as ‘the offending film (al-fīlm al-musīʾ),’ ‘the contempt of religions (izdirāʾ),’ ‘disgraceful behavior’ and ‘racist calls to religious disunion (tafarruqa)’ undertaken under the pretense of ‘freedom of thought,’ aiming to ‘stir strife, charge feelings of hatred and strife and chaos between the peoples.’ As to its background, the statement remained vague and only mentioned ‘people whose minds [are] filled with hatred.’ In contrast, the video was said to have no link whatsoever to Christians and Christianity. As a counter-reaction, the diocese called on Muslims and Christians in Egypt not to be tempted by this video, but instead to overcome this ‘test’ in peace. In comparison, the statement mentioned by *al-Ahrām* was reportedly issued by a Synod of the diocese of Ṭanṭa and its annexes in cooperation with the local Lay Council (*majlis millī*). In this context, the designation of “The Innocence of Muslims” differed; ‘all attacks on sacred items (muqaddasāt), insulting (ihāna) religious symbols and...

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104 Bishop Athanāsyūs was consecrated bishop of Banī Mazār in 2001 (Meinardus 2006, 39). This diocese was previously part of the diocese of Banī Swīf which was directed by Bishop Athanasius until 2001 (Meinardus 2006, 39).


106 هو صاحب أكثر من فتنة.


Islam, as well as violating the creed of the other and are harshly condemned. Again, Christianity was asserted not to promote such “offense” but instead to forbid it.

In the following paragraphs, we will look at joint Christian-Muslim conferences in which a number of Coptic Orthodox bishops participated. These are Bishop Mārtīrūs (general bishop and delegate of the Coptic Orthodox Church), Bishop Kīrillus (Najʿ Ḥammaḏī, Upper Egypt), Bishop Būlā (Ṭanṭa, Lower Egypt), Bishop Murquṣ (Shubrā al-Khayma, a northern suburb of Cairo), and Bishop Bisantī (Ḥilwān wa l-Maʿṣara, South of Cairo).

On 13 September 2012 Bishop Mārtīrūs participated in a conference entitled “No to stirring strife … Yes to supporting the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)” which was organized by the professional Association of Lawyers. Besides Bishop Mārtīrūs, several other personalities participated such as Gamāl Asʿad whom we will mention later on, as well as a delegate of the Faculty of Law from the University of Banī Swīf, Dr. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Zāhir, and a member of the Association of Lawyers, Ībrāhīm Īlyās. During this conference, Bishop Mārtīrūs submitted a document that would establish a joint committee composed of members of Al-Azhar, the Church and the bayt al-ʿāʾila (a joint Azhari-Church institution). Moreover, Bishop Mārtīrūs demanded the formation of a legal group composed of Egyptian lawyers to undertake legal proceedings against the producers of the video, especially Mūrīs Ṣādiq and Terry Jones. He also condemned art that offends any ‘religious symbol.’

In comparison, Bishop Kīrillus’ intervention at the eleventh festival of the diocese of Najʿ Ḥammaḏī for interreligious understanding took a different tone. The diocese was established in 1977 with the consecration of Kīrillus (Meinardus 2006, 42). In January 2010 the diocese witnessed a serious sectarian incident when a man shot at Coptic followers leaving the Christmas mass and killed six people. Subsequently, Bishop Kīrillus refused to testify against the instigator of this attack, a former member of parliament of the party of Mubārak. As will be shown later on, this event was an important step in the gradual emancipation of Copts from church tutelage (see Section 2.3.3.1). This event might explain the content of Bishop Kīrillus’

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109 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 13 September 2012. مطالب بشطب موريس صادق من نقابة المحامين.. مؤتمر "لا لإثارة الفتنة" يطرح وثيقة. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/13/%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1_%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AD_%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9_%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%89_%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1_%D8%A9%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86/784864#.VjszJF5OFVJ (retrieved May 21, 2016).

110 See Section 2.4. Protests and Joint Christian-Muslim Reactions; and 2.3.2. Coptic Organizations.


112 English al-Ahram. 18 November 2012. Church-state relations yet to change in Morsi’s Egypt.
speech. At this festival, he delivered a speech in front of 5,000 people, among them representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood. Throughout his speech, the bishop backed his thesis concerning good Christian-Muslim relations by using examples from history. For instance, the conqueror of Egypt, ‘Amr bin al-‘Ās restored Patriarch Bīnyāmīn I (623-662) to the Coptic Orthodox papal see and ended the ‘Byzantine occupation.’ In addition, he quoted Pope Kīrillus IV (1854-1861) who explained his refusal of Russian protection: ‘the near neighbor is better than the distant friend.’ This argument lacks a certain conviction, though. Moreover, the bishop reminded his audience of the statement issued by the Church condemning “The Innocence of Muslims” and emphasized the ‘Copts’” utter rejection of ‘despising religions (izdirā’).’ Despite this, he seemingly tried to some extent to overcome the Christian-Muslim binomial by pleading: ‘Yes to the peace between and the love for each other as Egyptians and no to despising each other’s religion as Egyptians.’

In Ṭanṭa, a conference was organized on the initiative of Bishop Būlā (see Section 2.4.3). Quite surprisingly, Gate al-Ahram entitled his article published on September 15 ‘‘anbā Būlā: ‘the offending film is a diabolical Zionist thought to destroy religions … and its hero is an agent of Mossad.’ Indeed, the speech by Bishop Būlā sharply contrasted with the sober statement(s) issued by the diocese of Ṭanṭa, as the background of the film was now ascribed to an ‘Israeli-American person’ and the main character is played by ‘the son of a leader of Hamas who has converted to Christianity and has become an agent of the Israeli Mossad, and the promoter is an Evangelical priest.’ This ‘Israeli-American person’ is probably “Sam Bacile” and the priest is Terry Jones. However, as it was shown in Chapter 1, the Egyptian media had established the involvement of some Copts living abroad from the beginning and by then (on 15 September 2012), even the Western media had refuted the speculation concerning “Jewish/Israeli” involvement. Moreover, the “agent of Mossad” is Muḥṣab Ḥaṣan Yusif who first started to spy for the Shin Bet and then converted to Christianity. In his memoirs, Son of Hamas, he alluded to the defining influence of Zakariyā Buṭrus on his conversion (Yousef 2011). Yet it is unlikely that Bishop Būlā had any precise knowledge concerning Muḥṣab Ḥaṣan Yusif. Still, this purported connection to “Zionism” and “Mossad” can be viewed as an

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114 To some extent, Bishop Būlā, who was consecrated bishop of Ṭanṭa in 1989 (Meinardus 2006, 43), can be described as a controversial figure in Egypt due to his fairly good relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi leaders. As a result, his nomination for the representative of the Coptic Orthodox Church for the constituent assembly was heavily criticized by youths and secular forces. In Al-Shuruq. 12 September 2012. “البابا الذي يريده “اليونان” “liable to die”.” Number 1320. Year 4. Page 8.
115 ‘I liked him – until I realized what he was saying. He was systematically performing an autopsy on the Quran, opening it up, exposing every bone, muscle, […], organ and then putting them under the microscope of truth and showing the entire book to be cancerous’ (Yousef 2011, 227).
attempt to divert attention away from Coptic involvement in “The Innocence of Muslims.” Additionally, the bishop called for laws forbidding ‘attack[s] on religion and religious symbols,’ the boycott of TV channels offending religions and he also reminds listeners that Christianity has likewise been targeted.

In contrast, Bishop Murqus, the bishop of Shubrā al-Khayma,116 used sober language to deliver his speech at a conference in Cairo which was organized by the Public Coptic Association (hay’at al-aqbāṭ al-ʾāmm) and the newspaper al-Muhāshīr on Saturday 15 (see Section 2.4.3).117 Like Bishop Būlā, anbā Murqus called for international laws against blasphemy and, in particular, called on the United Nations to intervene. He also demanded the establishment of a commission in Europe, the United States, and Australia. Referring to a criticism formulated in the official statements of the Church, he asserted that by the Christian injunction “love thee each other,” Jesus Christ ‘commanded us to love the other even if he differed in creed, thought, or religion,’ and concluded ‘Christ was a strange figure in his relationship with other religions.’ All in all, according to Bishop Murqus, this video had no impact on Christian-Muslim relations.

Bishop Bisantī of Ḥilwān wa l-Maṣara participated in the conference “Together to support the Messenger” which was mentioned on al-Muhīṭ on 20 September 2012,118 and on al-Zamān on 21 September 2012.119 Besides Bishop Bisantī, high-ranking members of the Muslim Brotherhood also participated in this conference, such as the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muḥammad Badīʿ (see Section 2.4.3). Perhaps for this reason, Bishop Bisantī defended Copts living in the diaspora against likely accusations, asserting that those who produced the video did not represent all Copts. In contrast, these few Copts were reportedly balanced by ‘hundreds of Copts in the diaspora who esteem Muslims and refuse offense’ and ‘thousands of Copts who love Egypt’ (al-Zamān 21 September 2012). Here Bishop Bisantī emphasizes a national unity which is not based on a common history. Instead, this national history rests on common values; ‘Christianity and Islam agree on the good treatment and non-offense’ (al-Zamān 21 September 2012), ‘we are one people’ (Moheet 20 September 2012).

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116 The see of Shubrā al-Khayma was re-established in 1992 with the consecration of anbā Murqus (Meinardus 2006, 43).
118 Moheet. 20 September 2012. Doi: http://moheet.com/2012/09/20/1668478-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%A7%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%8A.html#.VjeIWm5OfIV (retrieved May 21, 2016).
which only differs in prayer, ‘we love God and one another’ (Moheet 20 September 2012), ‘the Egyptian people is one woven fabric (nasīj), because every Christian has a Muslim friend and brother’ (Moheet 20 September 2012). This idea was famously expressed by Lord Cromer, who was consul-general of Egypt from 1883 to 1907, and expressed the dismay of the British colonial administration at not being able to differentiate Muslim Egyptians from Christian Egyptians. Lord Cromer therefore stated that a Copt was an Egyptian who prayed in a church and a Muslim was an Egyptian who prayed in a mosque (Hasan 2003, 19). The idea that Egyptians only differ in worship is a recurrent theme which was mentioned previously and was mentioned again during the Revolution by Watani: ‘it is difficult to distinguish a Copt from a Muslim, as the Muslim bears the cross and the Christ bears the Quran.\(^{120}\)

Finally, amongst the alternative ways to react, we have subsumed the cases of the diocese of al-Minūfiyya and the diocese of Banī Swīf.

The diocese of al-Minūfiyya displayed a banner over its see, stating ‘His Excellence anbā Binyāmīn,\(^{121}\) the bishop of al-Minūfiyya, the priests and the Coptic people harshly condemn (yastankirūna) the film offending the prophet of Islam, and announce their resentment together with their Muslim brothers and refuse the offense (isāʾa) of religions and their symbols.’\(^{122}\) Interestingly, Copts are designated here as a “people.” In contrast, however, the diocese of al-Minūfiyya represent the only case of a condemnation of the violence arising as a reaction to the film by the Churches in Egypt. Father Būlā Yaʿqūb criticized the violence in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims” (‘it is necessary to behave wisely’) and demanded that legal measures be taken against the producers and called for the making of a counter film to refute the content of this video.

Finally, the bishop of Banī Swīf, Bishop Ghubryāl,\(^{123}\) expressed his opinion on “The Innocence of Muslims” during a Bible lecture he gave.\(^{124}\) He described the video as an

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\(^{121}\) Bishop Binyāmīn who was consecrated in 1976 (Meinardus 2006, 41), is said to have been close to Patriarch Shinūda III (Hassan 2003, 134).


\(^{123}\) As previously mentioned, Banī Swīf was one of dioceses which were re-organized under Patriarch Shinūda. Prior to 2001, Bishop Athanāsyūs was its bishop but since then the diocese has been directed by Bishop Ghubryāl (Meinardus 2006, 39).

\(^{124}\) Watani. 15 September 2012. Doi: http://www.wataninet.com/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%7%D8%B1/D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%7%D8%B1/D9%88/85570/ (retrieved May 21, 2016).
ʻoffending film,ʼ ‘this actʼ and a ‘provocative work and insult.’ Indirectly he made Copts in the diaspora responsible for it, since he defended them: ‘they love their country; Muslims and Copts are friends in the diaspora.’ Moreover, he both refuted a Christian connection as ‘they do not know anything about the essence and teachings of Christianity,’ and considered its aim to be ‘spread[ing] division and strife (fitna) and instability in Egypt.’ Therefore: ‘this is a Zionist game to destabilize the Arab region.’ He also mentioned the participation of priests and Copts in the protests on Friday, 14 September (Section 2.4.2).

**Summary of Section 2.1.1.1: Dissociating Christians in Egypt**

All in all, the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church issued two statements, and out of 49 bishops in Egypt, twelve bishops reacted at least once in statements, comments to the press, speeches at conferences, and through participation in protests. Lower Egypt is more heavily represented than Upper Egypt, with the exception of Naj’ Ḥammādi. Even though the reactions did not encompass all bishops, this overall collective effort is interesting because it shows that the effort to dissociate Copts from this video was not undertaken solely by one person, as was the case under the patriarchate of Shinūda III. Instead, this effort was collectively undertaken by involving the Holy Synod as well.

“The Innocence of Muslims” was condemned without exception and overwhelmingly qualified as isāʾa, (an) “offense,” against Islam, Muhammad, and Muslims as well as against religious symbols or figures in general (the first statement from the Holy Synod, Bishop Mūsā, Bishop Tādrūs, Bishop Mīkhāʾīl, the diocese of Ṭanṭa, Bishop Binyāmīn, and Bishop Ghubrīyāl). In some cases, the video was also misunderstood as a film (second statement from the Holy Synod, diocese of Ṭanṭa, and Bishop Ghubrīyāl). Besides isāʾa, the most recurrent word to qualify this video was izdirāʾ, “contempt” (second statement from the Holy Synod, diocese of Ṭanṭa, Bishop Kīrillus, and Bishop Ghubrīyāl). In some instances, the video was condemned using moralizing objections (the first and the second statement by the Holy Synod, diocese of Ṭanṭa, and Bishop Ghubrīyāl). All in all, however, in no instances was the video or “film” mentioned by its title and if it were not for the context, it would be very unclear what these bishops actually condemned.

Most of the bishops were similarly vague when evoking the background to this video, which in some cases they did not mention at all (Bishop Ārāmyā, Bishop Mīkhāʾīl, Bishop Mārtīrūs, Bishop Kīrillus, Bishop Murquṣ, and Bishop Binyāmīn). In other cases, the involvement of “Copts in the diaspora” is mentioned (Bishop Mūsā) or the mention takes place indirectly when emphasizing the “loyalty” of Copts in the diaspora (second statement, Bishop
Bisantī, and Bishop Ghubryāl). However, the first statement by the Holy Synod and Bishop Tādrūs did try to put forward the Egyptian identity of the small network behind the film. In a few other cases, the involvement of Copts in the diaspora is denied by only mentioning Terry Jones (Bishop Athanāsyūs) or diverting the attention towards a “Zionist” or “Israeli” background (Bishop Ghubryāl and Bishop Būlā). In contrast, Bishop Mūsā and Bishop Būlā (in the statements) attempted to downplay the importance of those behind this video by describing them as a ‘small deviant group’ (Bishop Mūsā) and ‘persons [underlined by the author] whose minds are filled with hatred’ (Bishop Būlā).

Thus, both the designation given to the video and the definition of its background hint at the sensitive position in which these bishops felt themselves to be. So far, these statements have suggested the wish to condemn the video but by remaining as vague as possible. Yet there were two recurring criticisms against this video that seemed to be more explicit; the issue of Christianity and the alleged purpose of this video. Some bishops asserted that this “offense” contradicted Christian values or teachings (the second statement of the Holy Synod, Bishop Mūsā, Bishop Ārāmyā, Bishop Tādrūs, and Bishop Būlā in his statement). In this regard, Bishop Būlā and Bishop Athanāsyūs referred to the fact that Christianity had also been “targeted” in the past, by The Da Vinci Code. In addition, some bishops criticized the video for its alleged purpose, that is to say to spread fitna or futun, “strife” (Bishop Mīkhāʾīl, Bishop Ghubryāl), tafarruqa, “disunion” (the first statement by the Holy Synod and Bishop Būlā in his speech), as well as waqīʿa, “battle” (Bishop Tādrūs).

The Coptic Orthodox Church attempted to dissociate Christians in Egypt and in the “diaspora” from this video by three means; denying any Christian legitimization for this video, as has been mentioned previously, by speaking in the name of the Christians, and by making use of the discourse of national unity. The second statement from the Holy Synod establishes the Church more explicitly as the sole representative of the Copts; ‘this is the honest expression of the feelings of the Copts in Egypt and in the foreign countries.’ Furthermore, the statement asserted: ‘the Copts in the diaspora who belong to the church have already expressed their harsh resentment [for this video].’ In consequence, the Church draws a clear line between “us,” i.e. those who belong to her, hence to Christianity, and thus cannot be associated with “The Innocence of Muslims,” and “them,” the network behind it whose mention has been very cryptic, as shown above. This “we” is consequently associated with Muslims in Egypt. The Church uses slogans of Egyptian nationalism, such as abnāʾ al-waṭan al-wāḥid, “the sons of the one nation” (the first statement by the Holy Synod), yadan wāḥida, “the one hand” (Bishop Athanāsyūs). In addition, the second statement from the Holy Synod formulated a national unity
‘Muslims are partners in the nation and in humanity,’ that was used by the bishops (Bishop Mūsā, Bishop Mīkhāʾīl). This idea of “partners” or “brothers” in the Egyptian “nation” expresses the desire to achieve equality. In other instances, the Egyptian nation rests on a shared history (Bishop Tādrus, Bishop Athanāsyūs, and Bishop Kīrillus) or shared values and a common “woven fabric” (Bishop Bisantī). To some extent, this ever-present discourse of national unity was also used to convey criticism; for instance, Bishop Bākhūmyūs backed his condemnation of “Abū Islām’s” burning of the Bible using this national discourse.

Another interesting issue is the manner in which both Muhammad and Jesus are mentioned. In some cases, Muhammad is ascribed to the “religious symbols/figures” (*al-rumūz al-dīniyya*) (the Holy Synod, and Bishop Mārtīrūs to some extent), or evoked as “its Messenger” (Bishop Mūsā), nay the “[Islam’s] noble Messenger” (*al-rasūl al-karīm*) (Bishop Mīkhāʾīl) or as “its noble prophet” (the Holy Synod). In contrast, Bishop Tādrus described the video as an offense against the “person” of Muhammad. With regards to the mention of Jesus Christ, it will be shown later that the reactions of the non-officially recognized Evangelical Churches (section 2.1.4) emphasized Jesus Christ as an ethical model for emulation. This *imitatio jesu* is not obvious at all in the reactions of the Coptic Orthodox Church; instead Jesus Christ’s general command for mutual respect is emphasized (Bishop Ārāmyā, Bishop Murquṣ). However, there is a small hint at the “Islamization” of Christianity, as Bishop Bākhūmyūs calls for the attacks on “revealed books” to be stopped, including among them the Gospel in a likely attempt to delegitimize the verbal attacks of Salafi preachers on Christianity.

In defining the motivation for the Coptic Orthodox Church’s reactions, it is equally relevant to look at what is not mentioned. Two main issues that were not evoked at all are the content of the video itself, especially the first part displaying the alleged persecution of Copts, and the violent reactions which ensued. These two omissions can be understood as attempts to de-escalate the situation.

A few bishops and one of the lawyers from the Coptic Orthodox Church, Ramsīs al-Naggār, demanded an international law condemning the “offense” against religions (Bishop Mārtīrūs, Bishop Būlā in his speech, and Bishop Murquṣ). However, Ramsīs al-Naggār expressed the hope that such a law would not discriminatory. Interestingly, he states ‘a creed is something […] the human being is educated by since his childhood and respects its symbols, and it is not permissible for anyone outside this creed to offend its symbols. Insulting religious symbols is a red line.’

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In addition, these reactions can be placed in the wider context of the Church’s reactions against similar “offenses.” The Coptic Orthodox Church is indeed one of the greatest promoters of censorship (Guirguis 2012, 144). For instance, in reaction to the film *The Da Vinci Code*, the Churches in Egypt issued a statement on 30 May 2006 severely condemning it.126 This statement was signed by the heads of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Coptic Catholic Church, the Evangelical Community, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Episcopal Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Chaldean Church, the Maronite Church, and the president of the Middle East Council of Churches. These Churches condemned *The Da Vinci Code* film as lacking any ‘scientific foundation’ and denied that it was a product of ‘artistic creativity’ considering it instead ‘dominated by violence and cruelty.’ According to the churches, the film aimed to ‘despise (izdirā’) religion and its spiritual and moral values.’ Interestingly, the film was viewed as ‘propagat[ing] the Zionist thought [sic!]’ that strived to establish ‘a materialistic civilization, emptied of the spiritual and religious pulse, of the meaning of life and of the eternal destiny of the human being.’ Therefore, this statement condemning *The Da Vinci Code* shows very clearly that the Churches in Egypt dislike the criticism or “offense” of religious content. This dislike is shared to some extent by the other Churches in the Arab World as both the book and the film were also forbidden in Jordan and Lebanon.127 The book and the film *The Da Vinci Code* questioned the very founding narrative about Jesus Christ, as the author Dan Brown ascribed to him a wife and children (Brown 2003, 2004). However, the reactions of the Coptic Orthodox Church’s to the novel *Azazeel* by Egyptian author Youssef Ziedan revealed the Church’s dislike for any questioning of Christianity’s history in Egypt.128 *Azazeel* relates the dismay of Coptic monk Hiba at the fanaticism and violence of the Coptic Orthodox Church under Patriarch Kīrillus I (412-444) in fifth-century Alexandria (Zaydān 2008). Consequently, the Coptic Orthodox Church’s condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” followed a pattern of condemnation of similar criticisms directed at religion. The Bishop of Austria, Bishop Gabriel, justified these condemnations by Christianity’s imperative to respect other religions.129

However, Bishop Gabriel implied that the reactions in Egypt made a condemnation

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129 Gabriel, Bishop. 11 September 2015. Personal Interview. Vienna. This source is quoted in this chapter as “Gabriel, Bishop 11 September 2015.”
necessary, as these are ‘always dangerous’ (Gabriel, Bishop 11 September 2015). The idea that “The Innocence of Muslims” was potentially very dangerous for the Christians in Egypt also seemed to have been a core motivation for the Church’s and the bishops’ reactions. This feeling of a threat is particularly epitomized by the fact that the Holy Synod gathered three times in order to issue an official statement; on 9 September 2012, on 12 September 2012, and on September 21, and to refute the allegations by the Salafi Front (see Section 2.5.2). Further aspects which back this assumption are the common patterns of the reactions: the condemnation without exception of this “video,” its description as an “offense” and “contempt,” the general silencing or minimizing of its background, the dissociation of Copts in Egypt by various means, the use of the national discourse, the silencing of sensitive and potentially dangerous issues.

2.1.1.2 The Coptic Catholic Church

The Coptic Catholic Church numbers approximately 170,000 followers in Egypt. The patriarchate was established in 1824 following decades of contact between clerical members of the Coptic Orthodox Church and some Roman Catholic orders (in particular the Dominicans, the Jesuits, the Capuchin, and the Franciscans) (ibid). The church had no patriarch from 1908 to 1947 but since the mid-twentieth century, the Coptic Catholic Church has increased in importance (ibid.)

Interestingly, the reactions of the Coptic Catholic Church differed from those of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church both in terms of tone and content. There were two main types of reaction; the official statement issued by the Coptic Catholic Bishops and the declarations made by its spokesman, Father Rafiq Garish.

Starting with the reaction of the Church’s spokesman, Father Rafiq Garish was quoted by *al-Yawm al-Sabi’* on 9 September 2012, as the representative of a third Church (alongside Bishop Murqus for the Coptic Orthodox Church and Safwat al-Biayadi for the Evangelical Church). In this article, Father Rafiq Garish who is quoted with ‘on his side, he said,’ described the video as ‘this film’ produced by people ‘without any politeness or ethics,’ ‘ignorant of religion and its religious symbols/figures.’ Thus he remained highly vague with regards to the background of this video. Instead, responsibility was indirectly ascribed to the “West,” which ‘issues films that attack God himself.’ In contrast, ‘we reject this in Egypt.’ Moreover, Father Rafiq Garish dissociated the Church from the video by asserting the ‘Catholic

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Church[ʼs] respect for all ‘religious symbols’ and the fact that Christianity and Judaism are likewise targeted. However, this reaction also contained a slight criticism against ‘the simpletons (busutāʾ) amongst the Muslims’ who, according to him ‘have already been affected [by this] and viewed this as part of Christianity, but ‘Christianity is innocent.’ In addition to this criticism, a few days later Father Rafīq Garīsh accused the media of having ‘indirectly made free propaganda.’ Furthermore, he stated that the purpose of this video was to instigate a ‘battle (waqīʿa) between Christians and Muslims,’ but ‘we will not allow this.’ Besides this siding with Muslims, Rafīq Garīsh drew another line, demarcating the producers of the film from us; ‘those Copts who have participated in the production of this offending film are not Egyptians.’ This is the only mention by the Coptic Catholic Church of a Coptic involvement in “The Innocence of Muslims,” provided al-Shurūq faithfully quoted the spokesman, which is not certain.

Subsequently, Bishop Kīrillus Willyam issued a statement in the name of the members of the Council of Catholic Bishops in Egypt on the Patriarchate’s website. The statement dealt with several issues that were previously mentioned by Rafīq Garīsh. First of all, the Catholic bishops mentioned the role of the media but did not formulate the criticism of their spokesman; ‘with regards to what the media have published about the showing of a film offending Islam.’ Thus, the mention of the video by the media and not the video itself seemed to have triggered this statement. In addition, the bishops formulated a condemnation of ‘all forms of offense (isāʾa) against religious symbols whatever they are and from whichever source they come’ as well as of ‘every attempt to offend, distort or spread hatred.’ Therefore, the Coptic Catholic Church demanded ‘respect for all religious symbols (al-rumūz al-dīniyya): book, person, symbol (ʿilāmāt).’ Thus, it tried to include into the sanctity of so called religious symbols a broad spectrum, perhaps including things that are usually targeted by Salafists as practices of polytheism, such as the Christian mass. In contrast, the video – which was not explicitly defined as the subject of this statement – reportedly contradicted the ‘teachings of the Holy Book (al-kitāb al-muqaddas)’ which calls for the ‘love and respect of all.’ Furthermore, the statement addressed relations to Muslims by referring to the Nostra aetate of the Second Vatican Council. Here, national unity is not based on history or on a common “woven fabric” but instead on a shared theological foundation: believing in ‘the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth.’ Finally, the statement

formulated a prayer addressed to God, in which it called on Him to ‘enlighten the hearts of all with love and truth,’ likely expressing a fear of backlashes against Christians in Egypt.

**Summary of Section 2.1.1.2**

These reactions were much less alarming. Yet the Coptic Catholic Church expressed some implicit criticism towards the role of the media and the violent reactions of some Muslims. Interestingly, this Church did not use the binomial “Muslim-Copt” to back its condemnation, but rather referred to a more general belonging to Egypt and to the shared values of Muslims and Christians.

**2.1.1.3 The Evangelical Church**

The first Evangelical mission was established in 1854 by American missionaries (Meinardus 2006, 108-109). It founded schools, provided medical services, and gave Bible lectures. Currently, the Evangelical Church is led by the Evangelical Synod of the Nile (*majmaʿ injīlī al-Nīl*) and leads 312 congregations in Egypt (Meinardus 2006, 108-109).

Unlike the previous sections on the reactions of the Coptic Orthodox Church and of the Coptic Catholic Church, the reactions by the Evangelical Church in Egypt showed a common pattern. Therefore, this section will first briefly list all the reactions from the Evangelical Church and provide a short description of this church, and then analyze the recurrent patterns; i.e. the general condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims,” the criticism of the media, and the attempt to dissociate Evangelical Egyptians in particular from this video by various means.

An initial comment by the president of the Evangelical Church, Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī, was published in *al-Yawm al-Sābi* on September 9,134 the Presbyterian Church on September 10, 2012,135 two days later, on September 11, the Evangelical Synod of Cairo published a short statement;136 on September 12, Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī expressed himself again in the media;137 on September 15, *Gate al-Ahram* published a statement by a priest from the Evangelical Church

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134 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 9 September 2012. أقباط المهجر يشعلون الفتنة بإنتاج فيلم مسيء للرسول .. سياسيون يهاجمون القس الأمريكى. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Yawm al-Sabi 9 September 2012.”

135 Al-Shuruq. 11 September 2012. الكنيسة المصرية تنتقد الفيلم المسيء للاسلام .. ويوتسق فتوى الإصلاب .. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Shuruq 11 September 2012.”


137 Al-Shuruq. 12 September 2012. ثورة غضب伊斯兰ية مسيحية ضد الإساءة للرسول .. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Shuruq 12 September 2012.”
in Alexandria, Rāḍīʿ ʿAṭāʿ Allāh, and on September 20, *al-Ahrām* quoted the General Secretary of the Evangelical community (*ṭāʿa*), Reverend George Shākir.

The first common pattern in the reactions by the Evangelical Church was their harsh condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims.” For instance, in its article on September 9, in which *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ* asked several representatives of the churches in Egypt for their opinion on this video (see Section 2.5.1.), it also asked Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī, the president of the Evangelical Church for his opinion (al-Yawm al-Sabiʿ 9 September 2012). He expressed the ‘resentment’ felt by his church and its rejection. Similarly, General Secretary George Shākir expressed its rejection by the ‘Evangelical people of Alexandria’ as well as their condemnation and anger (al-Ahram 20 September 2012). Rāḍīʿ ʿAṭāʿ Allāh, a priest in Alexandria, said he felt ‘hurt by the offense against the feelings, the symbols and creeds’ (Gate al-Ahram 15 September 2012). However, Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī also directed a certain criticism towards the role of the media in drawing attention to this video, ‘calling on them to stop following the issue of this film’ (al-Shuruq 12 September 2012). Another recurring pattern in the reactions of the Evangelical Church was the attempt to dissociate themselves from this video by various means. Firstly, this attempt took place by simply stating the churches’ dissociation as the Evangelical Synod of Cairo did (Copts Today 11 September 2012). Another possibility was to back this dissociation by refuting, for instance, any connection to Christianity whatsoever. Unlike other statements, the Presbyterian Church underlined the contradiction of this “offense” not only with the content of Jesus’ message but with Jesus Christ himself, as an ethical model for emulation (*imitatio jesu*): ‘the method of the life of Lord Christ’ and ‘his noble teachings’ (al-Shuruq 11 September 2012). On September 9, Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī stated: ‘Christianity refuses any offense against the other’ (al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ 9 September 2012). Nevertheless, his reference to Christianity may also contain some criticism towards the way the film was dealt with which was by then widely discussed on Salafi channels. Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī said: ‘if someone offends us, we do not offend back. Instead Jesus said: “dominate your hatred,”’ and quoted Mathew 4:43 ‘But I tell you, love your enemies and […] pray for those who persecute you.’ Interestingly, however, in the original Arabic quotation Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī is giving, the brackets contain the sentence ‘bless so I help you, do right to those who loathe you.’ He may have possibly added this sentence to put more emphasis on his point of view. Likewise, Rāḍīʿ ʿAṭāʿ Allāh quoted Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians

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138 Gate al-Ahram. 15 September 2012. راعي الكنيسة الإنجيلية بالإسكندرية: من قاموا بإنتاج الفيلم المسيء ليسوا أقباطًا ولا مصريين. Doi: http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/251392.aspx (retrieved May 22, 2016). This source is quoted in this section as “Gate al-Ahram 15 September 2012.”

139 Al-Ahram. 20 September 2012. تدين الإساءة للمعتقدات الإنجيلية. “الإنجيلية” تدين الإساءة للمعتقدات. Number 45948. Year 137. Page 5. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Ahram 20 September 2012.”
‘do not let any unwholesome talk come of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.’ (4,29) (Gate al-Ahram 15 September 2012). As a result, according to these actors, the producers of this video could not possibly be Christians, since it ‘contradicts Christian principles and the Gospel’ (Gate al-Ahram 15 September 2012). In this statement, Rāḍī ‘Aṭā’ Allāh put even more emphasis on this disconnection by addressing Muslims: ‘Oh, Muslim brothers, I say that those who offended your feelings are not Copts because they belong to American citizenship and were stripped of their Egyptian citizenship, and they are not Christians because they are the furthest away possible from the values and love of Christ’ (Gate al-Ahram 15 September 2012). This idea of not being Egyptian is also put forward by Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī: they ‘do not have weight in the diaspora or in Egypt and do not belong to the Egyptians’ (al-Shuruq 12 September 2012). Similarly, the Presbyterian Church insisted on the video being the product of ‘individual (fardī) acts,’ remaining vague as to the producers who only ‘express their views’ and hinting at the danger of ‘generalization’ (al-Shuruq 11 September 2012). Finally, even before all these reactions were published, Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī insisted in his conversation with al-Yawm al-Sābi’: ‘We are not responsible for these acts that they commit outside [of Egypt] and we do not have to bear the responsibility for their mistakes’ (al-Yawm al-Sābi’ 9 September 2012). This quotation is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, because it sheds light on the difficulty Christian institutions and Christians in general in Egypt face in reacting to this video without putting themselves at more unease; that is to say the use of “they” and “their mistake” epitomize the difficulty of defining those behind this video without putting all Copts on trial. Moreover, this quotation also epitomizes the threat the video represented for Copts in Egypt: the accusation of treachery, suspicion, and confusion. The fact that this fear is most vividly expressed by the head of the Evangelical Church may result from the fact that Evangelical Christians still struggle to some extent with the accusation of being foreigners: ‘Theologically we are always on the attack somehow. I mean, we are on the defense against attack, namely is it legitimate to be a Protestant here, isn’t it a Western creation,’ stated Professor George Sabra of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut.140

2.1.1.4 The Episcopal Church

On September 14, al-Ahrām quoted Bishop Munīr Ḥanna, the bishop of the Episcopal Church in Egypt and North Africa and the Horn of Africa, as he ‘expressed his total rejection

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of any picture offending the noble Messenger.\(^{141}\) He added ‘the teaching of the Holy Book (\(al\-\)kitāb al-muqaddas) forbids the contempt (izdirāʾ) and insult of any human being.’ Here, the Episcopal bishop equated the offense of a religious content with a personal offense.

### 2.1.1.5 The Non-Official Evangelical Churches

In addition to the reactions of some of the officially recognized Churches in Egypt, a few non-recognized Churches reacted also to “The Innocence of Muslims.” These were the Baptist Church of Egypt on September 10 and the Adventist Church on 13 September 2012. When looking at these two statements, two questions arise: what is the content of the reactions and what is the extent to which they differ from those of the other officially recognized Churches.

The statement by the Baptist Church of Egypt, which was sent to \(al\-Yawm al-Sābi\)’ on September 10,\(^{142}\) showed a number of similarities with the other churches’ reactions in general and with the reaction of the Presbyterian Church in particular. Like the other churches, the Baptist Church rejected “The Innocence of Muslims” as an ‘offense against Islam’ and expressed its rejection of ‘any offense against religion and creeds.’ Similarly, the Baptist church tried to dissociate itself from this video, as its president Butrus Flāūs underlined the video as being the product of ‘individual cases’ and ‘when religious radicals appear from the Islamic side and declare Copts as unbelievers, they only represent themselves and not Islam.’ This sentence can be understood both as an attempt to prevent any confusion and as a criticism of Salafi preachers who declare Christians unbelievers. A similar criticism can be found in the Church’s statement when it says: ‘he [Jesus Christ] argued with their opinion [those who did not agree with him] and without harming their honor and invalidating the noble teachings.’ Again, this sentence can be understood as a criticism of some Salafi preachers. Like the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church formulated an \(imitatio\ \text{jesu}\), i.e. it put Jesus forward as an example in his dealing with his opponents. Eventually, the Reverend Butrus Flāūs did make a reference to the Egyptian context ‘the relations between Christians and Muslims are strong [because] they live in one country.’

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\(^{141}\) Al-Ahram. 14 September 2012. 

\(^{142}\) Al-Yawm al-Sābi. 10 September 2012.
The statement by the Adventist church – ‘the community (ṭāʾīfa) of Coptic Adventists’ – which was issued on 13 September 2012, differed slightly in its tone from the two previous churches. Firstly, it viewed the video as a ‘film’ that was ‘harmful for the feelings of both Muslims and Christians.’ As to its background, it defined it as a ‘small group that does not know the meaning of love, responsibility and respect.’ However, the statement referred to the violence in reaction to the video, unlike the vast majority of the church reactions, albeit in a cautious way ‘the violent reactions in Egypt and some Arab countries in the last two days.’ Therefore, the Adventist Church prayed to God to preserve Egypt.

Interestingly, these two churches reacted early compared to other churches. Their reactions use an imitatio jesu and criticize Salafi extremism as well as the violent reactions to the video.

**Summary of Section 2.1.1**

All the churches in Egypt officially condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” as an “offense.” Yet none mentioned the first part of the video and very few even evoked the violence at all. These condemnations were backed by different strategies. The Orthodox and the Evangelical churches in particular attempted to dissociate the Christians in Egypt from this film. While the Evangelical church put more emphasis on the moral dimension of Christianity, the Orthodox Church strongly resorted to the discourse of national unity using the binomial “Muslim-Copt.” This binomial, however, was not present at all in the reactions from the Coptic Catholic Church. As to the motivations, it can be assumed that the condemnations expressed a general dislike for “offending” any religious symbols and content. To some extent, these reactions might also have been a symbolic show of solidarity. However, the Holy Synod’s statements clearly attempted to prevent backlashes against Christians.

**2.1.2 Islamic Institutions**

The previous section analysed the Churches’ reactions in Egypt. This sub-chapter will focus on the reactions by “Islamic institutions,” i.e. the reactions of the muftī (2.1.2.1), of al-Azhar (2.1.2.2), and the president of the Higher Council of Sufi orders (2.1.2.3). This chapter views these three actors as “official Islamic institutions” because they are regulated by state laws, compared to Islamist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi organizations (which will be mentioned in a section further below) and claim to embody the legitimate voice

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143 The existence of this church in Egypt goes back to the 1920s (Guirguis 2012, 184).
of Islam. In this section, I thus argue that “The Innocence of Muslims” showed a high level of awareness of Egypt’s and the reacting actors’ core role in defending and speaking for Islam, i.e. Sunni Islam, be it the muftī or al-Azhar. This idea that Egypt has a role to play was backed by Islamist and Salafi organizations and parties, as will be shown in Section 3.1; at the heart of this idea lies the Al-Azhar institution.

Pierre-Jean Luizard rightly pointed out that al-Azhar, as a Sunni institution, is an essential political tool for the rulers in Egypt (Luizard 1995, 519). Since the nineteenth century the state has tried to incorporate this institution. Interestingly, al-Azhar has to some extent displayed a resistance to governmental encroachment and questioned its power by joining the revolt of Aḥmad ʿUrābī in 1882 (Luizard 1995, 541) and supporting the revolution in 1919 (Luizard 1995, 543). During the revolution of 1919, Coptic priests preached in the al-Azhar mosque, while Azharī ʿulamāʾ went into churches (Luizard 1995, 543), thus providing the discourse of national unity with a powerful symbol. The coercion of Al-Azhar that had challenged the rulers too often was achieved by a law in 1961 which basically “nationalized” al-Azhar (Luizard 1995, 545). As a result of this law, from then on “Al-Azhar” was composed of the Council of Senior Scholars (conseil supérieur d’al-Azhar; hayʾat al-ʿulamāʾ al-kubbār), the Council for Islamic Research (majmaʿ al-buhūth al-islāmiyya; direction de la culture et des recherches islamiques), the University of Al-Azhar, and the various institutes of Al-Azhar (Luizard 1995, 547). In the 1930s, Al-Azhar had begun to establish affiliated annexe institutions throughout the country (Luizard 1995, 544).

In the post-revolutionary period, its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood was ambiguous. On the one hand the Muslim Brotherhood can be seen as competing with Al-Azhar, as the organization has promoted a revival of Islamic religious practice since its establishment, thus questioning the monopoly of Al-Azhar over religion. Dissident Azharī ʿulamāʾ such as Yusif al-Qarādawī have joined the Muslim Brotherhood. However, on the other hand, the Muslim Brotherhood counts no high-ranking ʿulamāʾ of Al-Azhar amongst its members.145 Still, following the Revolution of 25 January 2011, shaykh al-Azhar Aḥmad al-Ṭayyīb, received the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muḥammad Baḍīʿ. In addition, the new constitution – forcefully implemented by Muḥammad Mursī –, amplified al-Azhar’s role because it enshrined the institution’s role in defining the conformity of new laws with the Sharia Law. This function was previously carried out by the Constitutional Court. However, afterwards, tensions grew between Muḥammad Mursī and Al-Azhar. In particular, President

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Mursī was accused of trying to infiltrate all state institutions, including Al-Azhar.  

Despite the state’s interest in using al-Azhar as a tool of political legitimization, the institution continues to envision a role of its own. For instance, at the fifth conference of the Council for Islamic Research in 1971, the institution attempted to overcome its history as an Ismaili institution, by stating that these were just buildings. Accordingly, al-Azhar ought rather to be ‘identified with a religious and scientific mission’ (Al-Azhar 1971, 287). Thus it defined Islam not only as a religion but also an ‘integrated culture’ (Al-Azhar 1971, 286). Similarly, following the revolution of 25 January 2011, shaykh al-Azhar ʾAḥmad al-Ṭayyib expressed, the institution’s views for the political future of the country. In a programmatic document, he supported the establishment of a national, constitutional, democratic, and modern state founded on the separation of power and on equality amongst its citizens.

2.1.2.1 The Muftī of the Republic

One of the first key questions when looking at the reactions of the muftī of the Republic and head of dār al-iftāʾ, ‘Alī al-Gumʿa, is whether and to what extent he claimed to speak in the name of Islam. Indeed, there were some tensions in the past between shaykh al-Azhar and the muftī over their competences with the shaykh al-Azhar eventually accepting the plurality of institutions issuing legal opinions (fatwā) (Luizard 1995, 547). Interestingly, in October 2011, dār al-iftāʾ warned against the spread of Shiism in Egypt, which allegedly threatened to provoke “fitna” (strife) and destabilization. Thus the muftī and the dār al-iftāʾ view themselves as a bulwark of Sunni Islam in Egypt.

In connection to “The Innocence of Muslims,” the media reported four reactions by the muftī; on 11 September 2012 in al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ; on 18 September 2012 the Washington Post published a statement by the muftī; on 21 September 2012 al-Ahrām, published an

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149 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 11 September 2012. نية ضد الفيلم المسىء للرسول.. "الأزهر": الداعون لإنتاجه هدفهم إشعال الفتنة.. "الإفتاء": ليس من الحرية ويمس أقدس رمز للمسلمين.. و"أقباط المهجر": نتبرأ من موريس صادقة وزقلمة. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/11/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%8D%A7%D8%B6%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%9A%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%99%D8%A9_%D8%B7%D8%A8_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%89%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%89%D8%AA_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF/782099#.VjDa3G50FVJ (retrieved May 22, 2016).
interview with the muftī,\(^{151}\) and on September 27 al-Ahrām reported that the muftī gave an interview to the German newspaper Sonntagszeitung.\(^{152}\)

In the first reaction reported by al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ on 11 September 2012,\(^{153}\) the muftī is said to have described “The Innocence of Muslims” twice as an ‘assault on sacred religious items (muqaddasāt)’ by ‘some extremists amongst Copts in the diaspora.’ Interestingly, the muftī viewed this act as an assault on human rights and therefore refuted the pretense of freedom of speech, since the video violated ‘the feelings of millions of Muslims.’ Thus, ‘Alī al-Gum’a claimed to speak in the name of Muslims. Consequently, he called on the ‘supporters of human rights, on moral and religious institutions, on people of wisdom to act.’ In addition, Muhammad was described as the ‘holiest human symbol [Muslims have] and he is their prophet Muhammad (PBUH).’ Similarly, al-Ahrām quoted Ibrāhīm Najm, the press advisor of the muftī, who stated that the dār al-ifāḥa supported peaceful protests, but condemned the violence against embassies ‘which leads to the fueling of the hatred of Muslims in the world.’\(^{154}\)

In his article published in the Washington Post on 18 September 2012, ‘Alī al-Gum’a put more stress on the idea that official Islamic institutions are needed.\(^{155}\) In doing so, he first criticized the current state of the Islamic world, which is reportedly leading to a growing discrepancy between the image the world has of Islam and the actual message of Islam:

The world is sorely in need of such lessons which represent the authentic teachings of the Koran and the prophet of Islam. It is important to separate these noble messages from those that are bandied about by those who have no competencies in religious interpretation, Koranic hermeneutics or the history of Islamic thought.

However, the muftī continued, these Islamic institutions are so weakened that inflammatory rhetoric has replaced thoughtful analysis as a motivator of action and a guide for religious sentiment. In addition, he emphasized the role played by prophets, amongst them ‘Abraham, Moses and Jesus: ‘They are revered teachers who taught us the very nature of reality, the purpose of our existence, and how to connect with God Himself.’ Here the muftī adopted the Islamic understanding of Jesus as a prophet, thus probably aiming to express his esteem for Christianity. In this article, the muftī also put an emphasis on Muhammad. In addition to

\(^{151}\) Al-Ahram. 21 September 2012. مفتى الجمهورية للأهرام: نصرة النبي تحقق باتباع منهجه ... والإسلام يرفض العنف وإرهاب الآخرين. Number 45945. Year 137. Page 40.


\(^{155}\) Gomaa, Ali. 18 September 2012. Egypt’s mufti: To Muslims, prophet Muhammad is ‘the mercy to all worlds’. Washington Post.
describing him as a teacher, he recounted a story in the life of Muhammad which supposedly established him as a model for emulation.

In his interview with *al-Ahrām* on September 21, the muftī emphasized anew the core role competent Islamic institutions reportedly have to play, and in particular the role he himself and the dār al-iftā’ had played since the outbreak of the crisis surrounding “The Innocence of Muslims.” He stated several times that the dār al-iftā’ was the first Islamic institution in Egypt to react to this video. Furthermore, ‘Alī al-Gum’a stated that the content of this video epitomized the ignorance of the makers of the video. In this regard, interestingly, the muftī did not mention the involvement of Copts in the diaspora, but instead remained very vague concerning the background; ‘the superficiality of [...] of all cultures, if there were any culture in the first place.’ As a result, according to ‘Alī al-Gum’a, the purpose of this video was to ‘stir sectarian strife (fitna ṭā’ifyya)’ and to destabilize Egypt. However, the issue of the image of Islam seemed to be at the center of the muftī’s attention in this interview. In particular, he expressed his suspicion over the timing, near the anniversary of 9/11; ‘spread the spirit of fear of and accusation against Islam’ as well as ‘accusing Muslims of fanaticism, terrorism, and savagery.’ Therefore, al-Gum’a called on Muslims to do whatever they could to promote a positive image of Islam and Muhammad; ‘how he founded a state based on the rule of law (ḥaqq), justice and equality,’ ‘how he spread Islam in the rest of the world with wisdom,’ ‘how this religion preserved the rights of women, how he [Muhammad] reversed the big and was merciful with the small.’ In addition, *sharīʿa* is said to equate human rights, and democracy, as ‘tending towards equality,’ which is backed by the Quran, according to the muftī. These assertions were aimed at proving the absolute conformity of Islam with liberal values. Again, the muftī underlined the dār al-iftā’’s core role in promoting this image of Islam. However, the muftī conceded that there was a certain tension between the freedom of expression and the freedom of ‘creeds of the others.’ All in all, he called on the West to revise its image of Muslims, to concede them same rights and duties, and not to view them as a “fifth column.” Thus, the muftī seemed to be aware of the problems Muslims allegedly face in Western societies as a second-class minority. Finally, ‘Alī al-Gum’a was asked by *al-Ahrām* about his satisfaction with the Christians’ reactions and positions on “The Innocence of Muslims.” In reaction, he established Egypt as a model:

The brotherly relations between the sons of the united nation (abnāʾ al-wāṭan al-wāḥid), Muslims and Christians, are governed by mutual respect and brotherhood. They grow in
firmness and strength generation after generation, and have become a model followed as an example in all states of the world.

Similarly, in his interview with the German newspaper *Sonntagszeitung*, ʿAlī al-Gumʿa again praised the position of “the Church in Egypt” [underlined by the author] [with regards to the crisis of the film]. ‘The Innocence of Muslims” was said not to have threatened the relations between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. On the contrary, according to the muftī, the video actually worked to unite ‘all Egyptians, Muslims and Christians.’ As to the background of the video, it was reportedly the product ‘a few extremists.’

**Summary of Section 2.1.2.1**

In his stances, ʿAlī al-Gumʿa insisted mostly on the role dār al-iftāʾ and himself played in the context of this video in defending Islam and promoting a “correct,” “true” image of Islam. In addition, he also expressed his esteem for Christians by emphasising Jesus’ importance as a prophet and teacher, and by thanking the “Egyptian Church” for its condemnation, and by underlining the good Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. These statements, however, reduced the variety of Churches to one national church.

### 2.1.2.2 Al-Azhar

This section will firstly analyze the reactions of the shaykh al-Azhar and secondly those of the institution.

The media reported on several reactions by shaykh al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Ṭayyib; however, it is not always clear in which context he expressed himself. References to reactions by Ahmad al-Ṭayyib were made by *Al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ* on 11 September 2012;¹⁵⁷ by *Al-Ahrām* on 13 September 2012;¹⁵⁸ by *Al-Ahrām* on 17 September 2012;¹⁵⁹ by *al-Shuruq* on 19 September 2012;¹⁶⁰ by *Al-Ahrām* on 20 September 2012;¹⁶¹ 27 September 2021;¹⁶² and 28 September 2012.

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¹⁵⁸ *Al-Ahrām*, 14 September 2012.
¹⁵⁹ *Al-Ahrām*, 17 September 2012.
¹⁶⁰ *al-Shuruq*, 19 September 2012.
¹⁶¹ *Al-Ahrām*, 20 September 2012.
¹⁶² *Al-Ahrām*, 27 September 2012.
Amongst these, on 13 September 2012, *al-Ahrām* referred to a statement published by Al-Azhar and on 20 September 2012, to a statement published by Al-Azhar the previous day (al-Ahram 20 September 2012). In addition, the views reported on September 19 by *al-Shuruq* were expressed in the context of a meeting with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius (al-Shuruq 19 September 2012). The statement mentioned by *al-Ahrām* on September 27 was delivered in the context of a meeting with the advisor to Muḥammad Mursī and the leader of the Nur Party, ‘Imād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr (al-Ahram 27 September 2012). The reaction reported by *al-Ahrām* on September 28 was the transmission of a statement made by shaykh al-Azhar on television (al-Ahram 28 September 2012).

In order to facilitate the analysis, we will first focus on three reactions – the meeting with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs on September 19, the statement published on September 20 and the meeting with ‘Imād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr –, before investigating three main issues that are referred to both in the reactions analyzed and in the reactions listed above; the mention of Christian reactions, the criticism of the West and the violence in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims.”

Firstly, at the meeting that took place between the shaykh al-Azhar and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius, on September 19 (the day the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* published another cartoon of Muhammad), Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib rejected the pretense that freedom of speech could be an excuse for ‘offend[ing] the other. There is no moral justification for this’ (al-Shuruq 19 September 2012). Accordingly, this would just lead to hatred between the people. Interestingly, Laurent Fabius agreed with the shaykh al-Azhar on the idea that freedom of speech could not be an excuse to ‘harm religions, its sacred items (*muqaddasāt*) and its symbols/figures’ and asserted that the video offended the West as much as it offended the ‘East.’ In addition, al-Ṭayyib demanded a law ‘criminalizing such actions.’

The following day, al-Azhar published a statement in reaction to the cartoons published by *Charlie Hebdo* (al-Ahram 20 September 2012). The statement viewed the cartoons as another offense against ‘Islam, its Messenger, our Lord Muhammad (PBUH)’ which accordingly poured more oil on the fire started by “The Innocence of Muslims.” However, al-Azhar repeated its condemnation of the violence in connection to this video; ‘refusal and anger must be expressed by peaceful means,’ [by] preserving the *sunna* of the prophet.’ Furthermore, in this statement Al-Azhar formulated an idea that it expressed throughout the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims” and which we will look at more closely below; a criticism of the West.

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163 Al-Ahram. 28 September 2012. Sheikh al-Azhar: The West continues to think in terms of darkness. Number 45952. Year 137. Page 4. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Ahram 28 September 2012.”
Thus, in its statement, al-Azhar recalled that: ‘Islam and its civilization played an important role in the sciences that were translated in the thirteenth century to European languages and formed [one of] the most important foundations of the European Renaissance, and led it out of the ages of darkness.’ This idea of Islam being of importance to all of humanity was also epitomized in the description of Muhammad as the ‘last Messenger of God to all humanity.’ The statement also made a demand based on a recurrent misconception; it demanded Europe criminalize “this,” like it criminalized Anti-Semitism. However, Anti-Semitism as such is not forbidden in Europe. In some countries denying the Holocaust is an offence for which a person can be prosecuted.

Thirdly, during his meeting with Ṣayyid ‘Abd al-Ghafūr, the advisor to President Muhammad Mursī, on September 27, Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib formulated another interpretation of “The Innocence of Muslims,” warning against the ‘existence of some forces that ambush Egypt as well as the Arabic and Islamic umma to divide them in the service of worldwide Zionism’ (al-Ahrām 27 September 2012). Therefore, he called on all political forces to ‘descend from their salons onto the real earth […], to re-formulate a social awareness for the umma in the light of religious teachings so that the man in the street understands his duties and responsibilities.’ Here, he criticized the ruling class.

Following this, we will look more closely at three main aspects in the reactions of Al-Azhar and of its shaykh; the reactions by the Christians in Egypt and the criticism of the West and of the violence in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims.” Interestingly, the first reference made to the position of al-Azhar in al-Yawm al-Sābi‘ on 11 September 2012, focused the issue of the Christian involvement in this video (al-Yawm al-Sābi 11 September 2012). On the one hand Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib seemed to concede the involvement of “Copts in the diaspora,” but on the other hand he asserted that ‘such acts’ did not express the view of ‘Egyptian Christians (masḥiyyūn) who have explained their respect for all religious figures more than once.’ Furthermore, he connected the issue to national unity; such actions accordingly only nurtured ‘the fire for fitna between the sons of the united nation.’ Similarly, on September 17, al-Ahrām quoted Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib praising the position of the ‘Egyptian Churches against the offending film’ (al-Ahrām 17 September 2012). Secondly, in addition to the criticism of the West previously mentioned, in a comment on a TV channel, shaykh al-Azhar Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib analyzed the West’s alleged uneasiness with Islam; ‘what we see today, the hatred against Islam and its civilization is not a child of the moment’ (al-Ahrām 28 September 2012). Rather, according to al-Ṭayyib, this hatred is part of the ‘legacy of European collective consciousness since the Middle Ages’ and is related to the very nature of the West, which does not ‘accept the
belonging to a religion (tadayyun).” In this regard, he put forward the examples of the Crusades and the fate of the Jews and Muslims in Andalusia. Thirdly, a more recurring issue was the condemnation of the violence in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims.” On September 13, Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib demanded that the reactions remained within the “boundaries of Islamic politeness (adab).” Similarly, the statement issued by al-Azhar, demanded that these reactions be ‘calm and wise’ and condemned the violence in connection to the embassies (al-Ahram 14 September 2012). A few days later, Al-Azhar again called for people to ‘stop the violence and excesses,’ and reminded that it was a duty to protect diplomatic institutions.

Thus, the reactions of Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib focused mostly on the West and countered “The Innocence of Muslims” with an elaborate analysis of the “West.” His mentioning the Christians in Egypt was secondary.

Besides the numerous reactions of the shaykh al-Azhar, two main institutions composing the current Al-Azhar also reacted, i.e. members of the Council of Senior Scholars (hay’at al-’ulamā’ al-kubbār) and the Council for Islamic Research (muḥjma’ al-buḥāth al-islāmiyya). In addition, we have the reaction of a professor from Al-Azhar, ʿĀtif ʿAbdallah. These reactions are made up of mentions in the media (‘demand,’ ‘said’) and of a conference on 20 September 2012.

The first two reactions date from 12 September 2012 when Maḥmūd Mahnā, a member of the Council of Senior Scholars,167 and Muhammad al-Mukhtār al-Mahdī,168 a member of the Council for Islamic Research and of the Council of Senior Scholars as well as a professor at al-Azhar,169 were quoted in the media. Maḥmūd Mahnā was mentioned in al-Shurūq on September 12 stating that:

Those Copts in the diaspora who participated in the offense against the prophet Muhammad do neither belong to Christianity nor to Judaism, but they belong to worldwide Zionism which wants to tear down the relations within the Egyptian society (al-Shuruq 12 September 2012).

166 Al-Shuruq. 12 September 2012. Number 1320. Year 4. Page 5. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Shuruq 12 September 2012.”
167 Al-Ahram. 13 September 2012. Number 45937. Year 137. Page 5. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Ahram 13 September 2012.”
168 Al-Shareyah. 17 February 2015. Doi: http://alshareyah.com/%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86/D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A/5385-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%BF%21-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%81%D8%A6%D9%88%D9%87%D8%A7.html (retrieved May 23, 2016).
Interestingly, the Egyptians were not mentioned as “the sons of the one nation,” but Maḥmūd Mahnā instead used a more neutral designation such as ‘Egyptian society.’ Furthermore, he described Muhammad as ‘the highest human being […]’. This is the courteous prophet who did not offend or harm anyone and who command all Muslims to believe in all messengers and all prophets.’ Thus, Maḥmūd Mahnā implicitly underlined the good Christian-Muslim relations by resorting to an *imitatio* *muhammadi*. In contrast, Muḥammad al-Mukhtar al-Mahdī was paraphrased only briefly by *al-Ahrām* and stated that the goal of “The Innocence of Muslims” was to ‘stir Islamic feelings’ (*al-Ahrām* 13 September 2012). The following day, in September 13, *al-Ahrām* reported that the Council of Senior Scholars ‘demand’ all Muslims to react to this ‘offense’ with ‘calm and wisdom’ (*al-Ahrām* 13 September 2012).

In addition, the Council of Senior Scholars, the Council for Islamic Research, and the organization ‘ulamā’ *al-dīn* gathered for a conference that was given at length by *al-Ahrām* on 20 September 2012. The article first mentioned that the violence, especially that against Western diplomatic institutions, was widely condemned. For instance, Muḥammad al-Mukhtar al-Mahdī, member of the Council of Senior Scholars and of the Council for Islamic Research, called on Muslims to express their anger without violence. He backed his argument by quoting sura 9:6 in the Quran ‘And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know,’ sura 108:3 ‘Indeed, your enemy is the one cut off,’ and a *hadīth* ‘If someone promises to protect someone and nevertheless kills him, I am not responsible for the murderer, even if the murdered is an unbeliever.’ “The Innocence of Muslims” was described as an ‘offense against the Messenger (PBUH),’ as the ‘offending film’ and as the ‘issue of contempt (izdirā’) – of religions’ with which ‘Zionist countries’ aimed to ‘intervene in the affairs of the Arab states.’ Similarly, Muḥammad al-Shaḥḥāt al-Jundī, a member of the Council for Islamic Research, condemned the violence in connection to this video by quoting 17:33 ‘And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right.”

As to the background, he conceded the involvement of ‘four Copts in diaspora,’ but who ‘do not speak for of course the rest of the Copts’ as well as the involvement of an Israeli producer. These four Copts are likely to be Mūrīs Ṣādiq, Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh and Zakaryā Buṭrus, and the Israeli producer to be Sam Bacile, i.e. Niqūlā Bāsīlī Niqūlā. Finally, Muḥammad al-Shaḥḥāt al-

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170 *Al-Ahram*. 20 September 2012. رقم 45944. السنة 137.


172 من أمن رجلا على دمه فقتله فأنا بريء من القاتل وإن كان المقتول كافرا.”

Jundī demanded the creation of an international law to stop the ‘repeated assault on and offense against Islam and its religious symbols.’ Finally, a professor at Al-Azhar, ‘Āţīf ‘Abdallah condemned the video, and rejected a generalization of all Copts. Instead, he saw “The Innocence of Muslims” as attempting to ‘divide the ranks and spread chaos in our country.’ Moreover, he emphasized that this was already preceded by the ‘Danish cartoons.’

2.1.2.3 The Sufi Council in Egypt

Amongst the reactions of official Islamic institutions, we have subsumed the reaction of the president of the Sufi Council in Egypt, ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Qaṣābī. This paragraph will firstly give a brief overview of Sufism in Egypt, and then analyze the reaction of ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Qaṣābī.

Mentioning Sufism in this section is justified by the strict regulation and legal framework of Sufism in Egypt under law 118/1976. This framework is embodied by the High Council of Sufi Orders (direction du conseil supérieur des confréries soufies) which gathers sixty-eight officially recognized orders under its umbrella. Besides these orders, there are also non-officially recognized orders. Approximately twelve to fifteen million Muslims in Egypt belong to Sufi orders (Paonessa 2013). These figures contradict earlier European scholarship which had foreseen the end of Sufism as a result of, amongst other things, the emergence of political Islam (ibid). Like other institutions, the Higher Council of Sufi Orders continued to express its support for the regime of Ḥusnī Mubārak during the Revolution of 25 January 2011, while a number of its members participated in the protests (ibid). Following the revolution, there was an attempt to participate in politics by establishing political parties or associations, and it described itself as an “apolitical” force, as a “secular” or “alternative” trend to Islamist and Salafi forces (ibid). However, this attempt failed due to the lack of human and financial resources and lack of know-how (ibid). In addition, even prior to the revolution, the Higher Council of Sufi Orders had been heavily criticized (ibid). It experienced a conflict in 2008 when the Council elected a new president. The regime intervened to promote a new election in which ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Qaṣābī, shaykh of the order qaṣābiyya khalwatiyya, was elected (ibid). ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Qaṣābī had been a member of this Council for only ten years. In addition, he was also a member of the then ruling National Democratic Party and a member of the Shura Council for the governorate of Ṭanṭa.

He condemned the production of a film by ‘a number of Copts in the diaspora’ whom he describes as ‘enemies of their [own] religion before being enemies of Islam’ in an attempt to draw Copts and Muslims into a conflict. According to him, the second goal of the video was to ‘violate the sanctities (ḥirmāt) of Muslims and accuse Islam of terrorism and blood[shed].’ The term “Copts in the diaspora” is used twice. At the same time, ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Qaṣabī praised the attitude of all religious institutions and Egyptian Copts.

Summary of Section 2.1.2

Al-Azhar embodies Egypt’s sense of mission in defending Islam and being a bulwark of Sunni Orthodox Islam against deviations. Yet dār al-iftāʾ and the muftī also strongly asserted their role in this mission, while al-Azhar focused on a criticism of the “West” and of the violence. With regards to the Copts, all three Islamic institutions expressed their thanks for the Church’s or the Churches’ stances, and underlined the good Christian-Muslim relations. To some extent, however, these statements regarding Copts may have been motivated by the media’s questions.

2.1.2.4 Niqābat al-Ashrāf

Finally, this section will end with the reaction of al-sayyid Muhammad al-Sharīf, the leader of the association of the descendants of the prophet Muhammad (niqābat al-ashrāf). This is dealt with separately from the official Islamic institutions because no official law regulates this institution apart from a decision issued by khedive ʿAbbās in 1895. According to al-Shārq al-Awsat, this institution owns endowments worth 70 billion dollars and counts six million āl bayt descendants in Egypt. In his reaction published by al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ on 11 September 2012, al-sayyid Muḥammad al-Sharīf tried to dissociate Copts from the video, by establishing a vague background of people who did not represent anybody except ‘people who are sick in their hearts’ and ‘these corrupted.’ In contrast, he asserted; ‘the Copts in Egypt live with us in peace, love, and brotherhood.’

175 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 11 September 2012.


177 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 11 September 2012.
2.2 The State

As the previous section on the reactions of official Islamic institutions (see Section 2.1.2) suggested, there was a sense of Egypt having a role to play, a mission in defending Islam. As of September 2012, this sense rested on two pillars; on the role of the al-Azhar as the most important institution in Sunni Islam, and on the recent election of a “truly Muslim” president, Muḥammad Mursī. A key question therefore is whether Muḥammad Mursī lived up to these expectations. Another question we will try to answer in this section and the following one (Section 2.3.1) is who had the lead in “defending Islam”? Was this role assumed by the president himself, by his government, or other groups? In particular, this issue questions the connection between the presidency and the government on one the hand, and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other. However, there is the question in the first place of whether Muḥammad Mursī and his government had any role to play in countering “The Innocence of Muslims.”

Thus this chapter will first deal with the state’s reaction to this video and the subsequent section (2.3.1) deals with the Islamist movements’ and parties’ reactions. This section will first look at Muḥammad Mursī’s reaction (2.2.1), secondly at the government’s reactions, i.e. Prime Minister Hishām Qandīl, the minister of Islamic endowments, Ṭalʿat Ṭafīfī, and the ministry of culture (2.3.2), and thirdly at the reaction of the Shura Council (2.3.3).

2.2.1 President Mursī: A Silent “Muslim” President

Al-Ahram Hebdo described President Muḥammad Mursī’s position in the controversy over “The Innocence of Muslims” as torn between his ideology, termed by Al-Ahram Hebdo as ‘populist rhetoric,’ and political requirements. As a consequence, according to Al-Ahram Hebdo, this tension also affected the Muslim Brotherhood, as will be shown further below. The first statement issued in the name of Muḥammad Mursī was published on 12 September 2012 by the spokesman of the presidency, Yāsir ʿAlī, that is, one day after the failed storming of the US embassy in Cairo. Yet, al-Ahrām mentioned the condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” first and only then the issue of the violence. In particular, the presidency condemned the ‘attempts by a small sinful (āthim) group to attack the position of the Messenger of God.’ Thus the issue of the background and the video itself remain vague. Similarly, Muḥammad Mursī attempted to present himself as the president of all Egyptians by speaking in their name: ‘the Egyptian people, [in] its Muslims and Christians, have already rejected this attack on sacred

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items (muqaddasāt).’ At the same time, however, he did divide the Egyptian people in religious terms, thus confirming the sectarian dimension of this video. Finally, *al-Ahrām* referred to the presidency’s condemnation of the violence connected to “The Innocence of Muslims” and quoted Spokesman Yāsir ʿAlī as alluding to the Egyptian state’s responsibility in protecting public and private property, especially embassies. This statement can hardly be qualified as a condemnation. As a result of the issue of this video, the relationship between Egypt and the United States became strained and greatly affected Muhammad Mursī’s reputation as a political leader. US President Barack Obama said on 13 September 2012: ‘I don't think we would consider them an ally but we don't consider them an enemy.’

In this regard, *al-Ahram Hebdo* even asserted that the condemnation of the violence by President Mursī only took place after he had a telephone call with Barack Obama. According to *al-Ahram English* this condemnation was expressed two days after the attempted assault on the US embassy. Thus, Mursī’s reaction was limited to a statement from his spokesman. Both his condemnation of the video and of the violence were rather lukewarm. He tried to present himself as the president of all Egyptians, yet he introduced the binomial “Muslim-Copt.”

### 2.2.2 The Government

In contrast, the Egyptian government, and especially Prime Minister Hishām Qandīl, were more vocal in their condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims.” The reactions by Hishām Qandīl were composed of a condemnation from the council of ministers and his participation in two conferences. The first reaction issued by Hishām Qandīl was mentioned by *al-Ahrām* on 12 September 2012. The article reported that the Council of Ministers, under the leadership of Prime Minister Qandīl, condemned the ‘film’ offending ‘Islam, its prophets and the religious sacred items (muqaddasāt).’ This comment “Islamicizes” all “prophets,” amongst them Jesus Christ and Moses. Besides this brief statement, Prime Minister Qandīl also participated in two conferences. *Al-Ahram* reported on 18 September 2012 on the organization...

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of a conference “The World is Gathering for the Support of the Prophet (PBUH)” by the League of Islamic Universities (rābiṭat al-jāmiʿ āt al-islāmiyya) under the leadership of the prime minister in cooperation with the Egyptian-Saudi Association for Brotherhood and Continuity (al-jamʿiyya al-miṣriyya al-suʿādiyya li l-taʾakhkhī wa l-tawāṣul) at Al-Azhar University (Center for Islamic Economy). The participants in the conference stated that the best reaction was not to use violence but to fight a thought with a thought. Lastly, Hishām Qandīl also led the conference “Offending Islam and Destroying Homelands (awṭān)” which was organized by the International Organization of African and Asian Writers and in which the minister of Islamic Endowments and a member of the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood participated (see Section 2.4.3). However, the prime minister seemed not to have delivered a speech at this conference.

In contrast, the minister of Islamic Endowments, Ṭalʿat ’Affī, expressed himself more often and more in detail on “The Innocence of Muslims.” We have counted four reactions, among them three statements and a speech at the conference mentioned above (see Section 2.4.3), as well as a comment by an agent of the ministry of Endowments in Suez. Ṭalʿat ’Affī is described by Al-Ahram Hebdo as ‘a sixty year-old Azhari also very close to the Salafist stream,’ and as ‘a pro Muslim Brotherhood Salafist.’ In 2001, he became dean of the Faculty of preaching (daʿwa), and helped to create the “Organization of the Sharia for Rights and Reform” (Organisme de la charia pour les droits et la réforme). His nomination was seen as an attempt to increase the Muslim Brotherhood’s influence in the state and Islamic institutions (ibid), especially since the Ministry of Islamic Endowments oversees the mosques, delivers permissions to imams and manages Islamic endowments (awqāf).

The reactions from Minister Ṭalʿat ’Affī reflect a certain progression, becoming more and more cautious. On 11 September 2012, al-Yawm al-Sābi’ published a statement in which the minister discussed the responsibility of Copts in the making of such an ‘offense;’ ‘such affairs (umūr) at the hands of the enemies of Islam are not unusual.’ More precisely, Ṭalʿat

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Afīfī distinguished between two types of Copts, the “bad ones” who were involved in the production of “The Innocence of Muslims” and the “good ones,” i.e. “the Copts of Egypt condemned this and they live with us in harmony and love.” There is not only no doubt that Coptic Egyptians were involved in this video: “the intention of a number of Copts in the diaspora to produce a film offending the Messenger (PBUH) in cooperation with the priest Terry Jones,” but these Copts are serving “Zionism,” “those who attempt to divide us [underlined by the author] or to disperse us, they follow the force (hayl) of Zionism.’ Behind all this “Zionist propaganda,” there are ‘some Copts in the diaspora who depict Islam as a terrorist religion to the world.’ This assumption is supported by a long quotation of the Quran 8:36-38:

Indeed, those who disbelieve spend their wealth to avert [people] from the way of Allah. So they will spend it; then it will be for them a [source of] regret; then they will be overcome. And those who have disbelieved - unto Hell they will be gathered. / [This is] so that Allah may distinguish the wicked from the good and place the wicked some of them upon others and heap them all together and put them into Hell. It is those who are the losers. / Say to those who have disbelieved [that] if they cease, what has previously occurred will be forgiven for them. But if they return [to hostility] - then the precedent of the former [rebellious] peoples has already taken place.193

As a result, the Copts involved in the production of the video were ascribed to the “unbelievers” Islam fought at its beginnings. In addition, Ṭalʿat Afīfī asserted that these Copts only offended themselves and that early Islam had already had to deal with such animosity. This contextualization of “The Innocence of Muslims” in an Islamic setting is quite striking; for instance, Islam is merely described as: ‘the religion of God is the dearest and most noble of his attainments.’

In contrast, the two subsequent reactions from the minister were much more cautious, especially when it came to discussing the “Coptic involvement.” On 12 September 2012 al-Ahrām quoted him as saying ‘creative freedom must never violate religious creeds and warning against nurturing feelings of hate and provoking the feelings of Muslims.’194 Similarly, in his statement on September 20 or 21, he did not mention the background of the cartoons published by Charlie Hebdo on 19 September 2012.195 Al-Ahrām merely mentioned a group of ‘people who hate.’ Minister Afīfī recalled that these ‘series of offenses’ would not be the last ones. Accordingly, these “offenses” aimed to provoked the ‘feelings of Muslims and stir sectarian

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194 Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012. غضب شعبي من الإساءة للرسول. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.
strife in Islamic countries.’ Thus, Egypt was defined as a “Muslim” country. In addition, instead of openly condemning the violence in reaction to this video, ‘Affī called on all Muslims to raise a ‘voice of reason.’ Finally, we shall examine the reaction of an agent of the ministry of Islamic endowments in Suez, Kamāl Barbaṛī, who demanded the suspension of relations with the United States to express the ‘anger of the Islamic umma.’¹⁹⁶ This reflects the preference of ideological principles over political concerns.

The reactions given by Ṭal‘at ‘Affī display a progression in terms of distinguishing between “good” Copts, who show solidarity with Muslims, and the “bad” Copts behind this video, whom he associated with early Islam “disbelief,” and finally speaking of a vague background.

Besides those emanating from the prime minister and the ministry of Islamic endowments, the media also mentioned two reactions by the Ministry of Culture. In both reactions, on September 17 and in a statement issued on September 18, the ministry expressed its ‘total rejection of all practices leading to any form of offense of religions and creeds, messengers and prophets.’¹⁹⁷ In the statement issued on September 18, Minister Muḥammad Sābir ‘Arab, ascribed the responsibility of “The Innocence of Muslims” to a ‘group of suspicious [people]’ aiming to stir up ‘strife’ and serve the ‘interests of international groups calling for extremism and terrorism.’¹⁹⁸

2.2.3 The Shura Council

On 12 September 2012, the Shura Council in the Egyptian parliament discussed a statement drafted by MP Aḥmad Fahmī of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁹⁹ In addition to this statement, al-Ahrām also quoted four MPs from both the Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafi Nur Party. All in all, these statements mainly put pressure on President Muḥammad Mursī to taking a firmer stance towards the United States, which were viewed as being responsible for “The Innocence of Muslims.” For instance, the statement by the Shura Council called on the US Administration and American civil organizations to take necessary measures and on Muḥammad Mursī to suspend all relations with the United States until its Administration had apologized for the video, thus considering the government to be responsible.

In contrast, the Shura Council took an interesting position towards the Christians in

Egypt. On the one hand, it did not mention the involvement of Copts but remained vague; the ‘irresponsible behavior of a group which issued a film offending Islam and its noble prophet.’ On the other hand, however, the Shura Council positioned itself to some extent as an Islamic parliament, as it praised the ‘position of some rational voices from amongst the sons of the other [underlined by the author] revealed religions in and outside of the country.’ In contrast, MP Sa’d ‘Imāra, of the Freedom and Justice Party, did mention the involvement of ‘unfortunately, a priest’ in this ‘attack on Islam and the prophet.’ Yet according to Sa’d ‘Imāra, “The Innocence of Muslims” was entitled “The Day of the Trial of the Messenger Muhammad” and accordingly aimed to produce ‘strife between Muslims and Christians, [and] spread a spirit of religious and sectarian racism.’ In contrast, MP Ṭāriq Sahrī, of the Nur Party, explicitly mentioned the ‘Copts in the diaspora,’ especially those who ‘demand the intervention of Israel and the United States and its division [of Egypt].’ The two other MPs quoted by al-Ahrām mainly questioned the defense of Islam in Egypt. MP ‘Azz al-Dīn al-Kawmī of the Freedom and Justice Party, criticized the stance of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the reaction from by Al Azhar and dār al-iftā of only protesting the video. Furthermore, the first speaker of the parliament, ‘Abdullah Badrān of the Nur Party, emphasized the statement’s demand to stop all relations with the United States, especially since ‘we now have a Muslim president.’ Yet he conceded that such ‘attacks’ have not hindered the spread of Islam. In addition, the statement from the Shura Council considered “The Innocence of Muslims” counter to the efforts to create cultural dialogue, a ‘racist and extremist call’ and an ‘attack on Islam and its Messenger.’

These reactions show a certain degree of pressure being put on the president.

**Summary of Section 2.2**

The various reactions subsumed under the category of “the state” show a variety of positions; on the one hand, the rather silent and passive president and on the other hand, an eagerness in “defending Islam,” especially by Minister Ṭal’at ‘Afīfī and the Shura Council. With regards to the Copts, the distinction between “good” and “bad” Copts as well as the distinction between Muslims and Copts is made.

### 2.3.1 Islamist and Salafi Reactions: Preventing Backlashes Against Christians

This section will analyse the reactions by the Muslim Brotherhood, its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (ḥizb al- ‘adāla wa l-hurriyya), al-da’wa al-salafiyya and its political
arm, the Nur Party (ḥizb al-nūr), al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya and its political arm, the Building and Development Party (ḥizb al-bināʾ wa l-tanmiya). As these parties were competing on a political level, the section will focus among other issues on the question as to which party tried to take on the lead in “defending Islam” and about how they referred to the Coptic background of this video.

2.3.1.1 The Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party

In the first place, the Muslim Brotherhood did not play a leading role in beginning the Revolution of 25 January 2011. Following the revolution, in February 2011 the movement established a political party, the Freedom and Justice Party (ḥizb al-ʿadāla wa l-ḥurriyya, FJP). In doing so, the Muslim Brotherhood was said to aiming to show a clear separation between the movement and the political party. Thus ʿIṣām al-ʿAryān became vice chairman of the Freedom and Justice Party after resigning his position as member of the Guidance Bureau and as spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, the new party tried to present itself as a broad based political party which allegedly comprised one hundred Copts and whose vice-general secretary was the Protestant intellectual Rafig Ḥabīb.

Yet, the party’s reactions are few compared to the Muslim Brotherhood, and Rafig Ḥabīb is not known to have given a reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims.” In its first statement, published in the evening of September 11 – just when the assault on the US embassy took place –, the Freedom and Justice Party described “The Innocence of Muslims” as a ‘racist crime,’ a ‘blatant attack on the religious sacred items (muqaddasāt)’ which was ‘morally and religiously wrong’ and aimed to ‘fuel internal conflict.’ Thus, the party did not seriously address the background of this video, but took a very cautious and de-escalating stance. For instance, the statement invoked national unity and again differentiated between Muslims and Copts; ‘the Egyptian people in its two components, Muslims and Copts, was, continues, and will remain united against these mean attempts.” Furthermore, the statement praised the reason of the ‘sons of this nation (waṭan),’ especially the clerics of the institutions Al-Azhar

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200 To avoid any confusion with the Lebanese al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya, the transcription of the Egyptian al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya uses a “g.”
203 Ahram Online. 3 December 2011. Freedom and Justice Party.
205 “الشعب المصري في عصره، مسلمين وأقباط، كان ولا يزال وسطي يبدأ واحدا في مواجهة تلك المحاولات الدينية.”
and the Church and as well the people of the media.’ By then, however, only al-Yawm al-Sābi’ had published a comment by the shaykh al-Azhar and al-Ahrām mentioned the publication of an official statement on September 13. Furthermore, the churches in Egypt are reduced to one Church. Surprisingly, the statement praised the media for its sensitive approach, which was in fact quite the contrary, as will be shown in Section 2.5.1. In contrast, the second statement published on September 20, in reaction to the cartoons published by Charlie Hebdo, referred explicitly to their background as it demanded the French government take measures206 and French justice deal with the issue of these cartoons as they dealt with the pictures of the Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton.207 These demands were justified by the fact that ‘the cartoons offended the people as a whole. It is a duty to respect the creeds of others.’

Overall, it seemed that the Freedom and Justice Party was cautious to dissociate Christian Egyptians from “The Innocence of Muslims.” On September 13, al-Ahrām wrote: “The Muslim Brotherhood considers” the video ‘a racist crime and an attempt to stir up sectarian strife between the components of the umma and the symbols of the sons of the nation.’ In addition, the movement called the Christians’ condemnation of this video. Thus on September 14, the party’s section in Gharbiyya published a statement in which it considered the video a ‘racist crime and […] failed attempts to stir up sectarian strife (fitna ṭā’ifyya) between the two elements of the nation, Muslims and Christians.’ Similarly, a high-ranking member of the Freedom and Justice Party, Muḥammad ʻImād al-Dīn, was quoted by al-Yawm al-Sābi’ on 8 September 2012 as denying the representativity of those who produced the video; ‘they do not express the tolerant Christianity we know.’ Even though this declaration may have been motivated by the newspaper’s questions, as we argue (see Section 2.5.1), the content

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of this declaration nevertheless suggests the party’s serious and sustained attempt to prevent any backlash against Christians in Egypt. In addition, the party also condemned the violence in connection with “The Innocence of Muslims,” albeit in a very light way. On September 12, for instance, Al-Ahrām quoted ‘Iṣām al-‘Aryān as demanding protests to express the Muslims’ feelings. The statement published on September 20 reiterated al-‘Aryān’s condemnation of the violence.

In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood reacted more frequently. These reactions are divided into two types; firstly, general declarations (this section, 2.3.1.1) and secondly, participation in protests and conferences. The latter will be analysed in the subsequent chapter (Chapter 2, 4.). This chapter will first focus on the declaration issued on September 13, secondly on the condemnation of the violence, thirdly on the letter from Khayrat al-Shāṭir to The New York Times and, finally, on the various statements by the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muḥammad Badīʿ.

Like the Freedom and Justice Party, the first statements made by the Muslim Brotherhood seemed to aim to prevent backlashes against Christians. Like Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn, a member of the FJP, al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ also asked a high-ranking member of the Muslim Brotherhood for his opinion (see Section 2.5.1). This member, Kārim Raḍwān, defined the video as an offense against ‘the Messenger of humankind, Muhammad’ and therefore asserted that the Muslims ‘will not allow anyone – whether the Copts in the diaspora or others’ to repeat this. Yet he asserted that these Copts offended the Copts in Egypt in the first place before they offended Muslims and recalled that Christianity did not allow such offenses. Although Kārim Raḍwān did not defend Christians and Christianity as fiercely as Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn did, he did indeed try to dissociate them from the video. This declaration will be analysed further in Section 2.5.1.

In addition to these declarations in the name of the Muslim Brotherhood, there are five instances known in which the movement condemned the violence, albeit in a very peculiar way. Overall, the Muslim Brotherhood seemingly wanted to downplay the gravity of the assault on the US embassy. For instance, Ḥamdī Ḥassan, described as a ‘leader’ in the movement, spoke of ‘a number of protesters’ who attempted to storm the embassy. A few days later, on September 17, another leading member, Muḥmūd Khalīl, stated that the reactions in the areas

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212 Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.
of the US embassy were not ‘disciplined.’ The immunity of embassies, which did not seem to be obvious, was justified by the fact that foreigners in Egypt are ‘under our protection (dhimma),’ as ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Birr recalled, also condemning the murder of the US ambassador to Libya. Similarly, at a conference with Bishop Bisantī, Muḥammad Bādī emphasized the need to protect embassies. In addition, there was an instance where Muḥammad Ḥābib, a former deputy leader of Muslim Brotherhood expressed the need for the reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims” to reflect the sunna of Muḥammad.

Khayrat al-Shāṭir, the deputy Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, sent a letter to the New York Times that was published on 13 September 2012. In his letter, he emphasized that ‘we do not hold the American government or its citizens responsible for the acts of a few who abuse the laws protecting freedom of speech.’ Still, he believed that Egyptians did have a right to demonstrate in the new, democratic Egypt. He expressed his wishes for continued good relations between the two countries, since ‘our nations have much to learn from each other as we embark on building [a] new Egypt.’ This is a very accommodating letter, adapted to a Western audience.

Finally, Muḥammad Bādī reacted three times to “The Innocence of Muslims.” In two of his weekly letters he dealt with this issue; on September 21 and on September 28. In addition, he delivered a speech at the conference “Together for the Support of the Messenger” in which Bishop Bisantī also participated. In all of these reactions, there were recurrent themes, such as the video itself and its background, and the involvement of Copts. Even though the question of Coptic involvement was not the main focus of his reactions, at the conference he expressed his gratitude for ‘our Christian (masihāyyūn) brothers in Egypt and beyond’ and asserted in his weekly letter that this ‘event’ ‘united the Egyptians and it is not fair to make our Christian (masihāyyūn) brothers bear the sinful burden of a group of idiots in foreign countries.’

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218 Al-Zaman. 21 September 2012. ‘أقباط مصر بين معركة حقوقهم وتداعيات الفيلم المسيء.’
220 Khayrat al-Shāṭir was first a former member of the “Socialist Union” under the leadership of Gamāl Ḥusnī Mubārak, before joining the Muslim Brotherhood in 1980. He was several times imprisoned under the presidency of Ḥusnī Mubārak and finally released in March 2011, following the revolution. Nicknamed “al-muhandis” (“the engineer”), Al-Ahram Hebdo considers Khayra al-Shāṭir highly powerful and influential within the organization and describes him as a millionaire. In Al-Ahram Hebdo. 4-10 April 2012. Al-Chater, un homme d’affaires milliardaire. Number 916. Year 18. Page 5.
222 Al-Zaman. 21 September 2012. ‘أقباط مصر بين معركة حقوقهم وتداعيات الفيلم المسيء.’
223 “إنَّا نتحمل أخوانا المسيحيين وزر مجموعة من السفهاء في الخارج.”
contrast, Baḍī‘ remained very vague when it came to “The Innocence of Muslims” itself and its background; those behind it were ‘soldiers of the devil,’224 ‘the offense against the Messenger of God’ produced by a group in foreign countries, which was reportedly ‘moved by hidden hands’ (al-Ahram 21 September 2012) ‘the repeated offenses against the Messenger of God (PBUH) are issued by people whose hearts are filled with hatred against the revival [...].’225 In this regard, Muḥammad Baḍī‘’s main focus was on Islam. Firstly, he explained that it was a duty for every Muslim to practice da‘wa, i.e. explain who Muhammad was and bear the ‘values of justice, freedom, dignity and tolerance’ by embodying these values (al-Ahram 21 September 2012). Accordingly, Muslims should express their anger at “The Innocence of Muslims” by emulating Muhammad (ibid). Moreover, Baḍī‘ explained the occurrence of this video by the ‘hate against the revival of humanity, spiritual vigilance, and the emergence of the Arab Spring which again calls for the return of Islam; a model for life and a message of light’ (ibid).226 He underlined humankind’s need for Islam; ‘for someone who retrieves it from material tyranny, moral decay, spiritual hollowness, social darkness, racial discrimination, the violation of human rights, and the abuse of their dignity’ (al-Ahram 21 September 2012).227 To some extent, these comments implied that a new age of Islamic revival under the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood had arrived.

**Summary of Section 2.3.1.1**

The Freedom and Justice Party and the Muslim Brotherhood came under pressure because of the violent reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” They employed different strategies to counter both the video and this violence: downplaying the violence, invoking an Islamic revival under their lead and dissociating Christians from this. In this regard, the Muslim Brotherhood was more vocal when “defending Islam” compared to the presidency.

**2.3.1.2 The Nur Party and al-Da‘wa al-Salafiyya**

The Nur Party (ḥizb al-nūr, Light Party) was founded in May 2011228 and, from its establishment on, it was torn between its ideological stances and political requirements. In
particular, the former leader of the Nur Party, ʿImād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr, has shown extensive political pragmatism; ‘as the secretary of the Nur Party, I have strong relations with all political parties and different streams, in addition we have now relations with all the communities (tawāʿif) and Islamist streams as well as the non-Islamist streams.’ 229 Additionally, he formed a group of experts to draft a political program, many of whom were not Salafists (Lacroix 2012, 3). However, as there was no clear divide between the political party and the proselyting organization – al-daʿwa al-salafiyya –, tensions increased over time and were very perceptible in September 2012. Al-Shurūq quoted one anonymous source, which said that ʿImād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr and al-daʿwa al-salafiyya had contracted an agreement guaranteeing the former full autonomy in managing the party. 230 However, the source added that al-daʿwa al-salafiyya had begun to interfere in political matters (ibid). Concerning Christians, the positions of both Nur Party and al-daʿwa al-salafiyya were conflicting. The Nur Party’s program stated that ‘Sharia guarantees religious freedom to Copts’ (Lacroix 2012, 5). On the one hand, radicals within the Nur Party criticized the Muslim Brotherhood for participating in the Christmas mass in January 2012, describing it as a place where ‘three gods are worshipped.’ 231 On the other hand, however, ʿImād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr expressed his hope that Christians would run for the party. However, Yāsir al-Burhāmī, the leader of al-daʿwa al-salafiyya, reaffirmed that only Muslims should ‘occupy positions “linked to the objectives (maqasid) of the state”’ (Lacroix 2012, 6).

This section will discuss the reactions by the Nur Party and then al-daʿwa al-salafiyya, all of which only represent a part of the overall reactions from this stream. In addition to these reactions, the participation in and organization of protests (Section 2.4) and the reaction to Anti-Christian reactions (Section 2.5.2) also shape the position of the Nur Party and al-daʿwa al-salafiyya in the context of “The Innocence of Muslims.” In particular, we will look at whether the reactions of the political party and of the preaching organization differed in their content and what the core issues were. More specifically, the paragraph will first focus on three statements; the first one by the media spokesman of the Nur Party, Nādir Bakkār; the second by the official spokesman of the party, Yasrī Ḥamād; and the sermon by the secretary general ʿImād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr. We will then look at how both the party and the organization viewed the issue of violence and secondly at the various demands they expressed. Finally, the paragraph will closely analyse the long statement issued by al-daʿwa al-salafiyya.

Looking at the first tweet posted on his Twitter account by media Spokesman Nādir

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Bakkār on 9 September 2012, it seems that there was initially some confusion over the exact background of “The Innocence of Muslims.”232 In this tweet, he expressed the need not to ignore the ‘Dutch film’ that needed an ‘appropriate answer.’ In addition, Nādir Bakkār condemned the decision by the Dutch parliament to grant Copts political asylum, considering this to be interference in Egypt’s internal affairs. A few days later, the party’s spokesman, Yasrī Ḥamād, was quoted in al-Shurūq as having given two messages.233 In his first message, addressed to ‘those who pretend to be sad about the plight of Non-Muslim minorities,’ he asked:

‘Where is your defense of your prophet and his law (ṣharīʿa) against those who dare [offend] the prophet under the pretence of freedom?’234 Yasrī Ḥamād addressed his second message to those who ‘accuse the sons of Islam of wanting to fragment society in the name of religion;’

Where are your voices now? You are now silent like the dead and you remain quiet [when faced with] Copts in the diaspora (aqbāṭ al-mahjar) who were announcing that God is love; and when they left your country, they declared enmity for you and abuse your religion and your prophet.235 These two ‘messages’ are first and foremost criticisms directed towards Muslims in Egypt denouncing their alleged passivity. Thus, defending the prophet is defined as an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim. Interestingly, however, “aqbāṭ al-mahjar” are no longer viewed as Egyptians, as they ‘left your country’ [underlined by the author], thus suggesting that Egypt was not their country or, at least, not any longer. In this regard, it is not clear when this alienation supposedly took place; before leaving Egypt, when leaving Egypt, or when the so-called attacks on Islam and Muslims began? In contrast, the sermon by ‘Imād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr on Friday 14 September 2012 in a mosque in Alexandria did not criticize the lack of reaction but the wrongness of these reactions.236 In his sermon, the then general secretary of the Nur Party and advisor to President Muhammad Mursī for Social Affairs strongly criticized the murder of ‘ambassadors or diplomats,’ rejecting countering an ‘error in the truth (ḥaqq) of the Messenger

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232 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 9 September 2012. Doi:
http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/9/%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%89-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%BA%D9%84%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A3%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84/779989#.VkGos15OFVJ (retrieved May 23, 2016).


with an [other] error,’ and instead insisted that ‘the true support of God and his Messenger must be at the height of the book of God, by reviving the *sunna* of the Messenger and spreading both of them in the world’ (ibid). In addition, ‘Imād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr condemned the burning of a Bible, reminding his audience that ‘God and his Messenger forbade the offense of the other religions,’ and he expressed the ‘need not to punish the Christians of Egypt (*masiḥiyyī miṣr*) for the crime of the producer of the film’ (ibid). This mention of the “Christians of Egypt” contrasts to some extent with the mention made previously by Yasrī Ḥamād. The designation “Christians of Egypt” is much more neutral than “Copts in the diaspora,” because it does not question the belonging of these Christians to Egypt and does not discuss their involvement in “The Innocence of Muslims” whatsoever.

Despite these conciliatory stances which aimed to avoid any backlash against Christians, it seems that the Nur Party was criticized for its stance towards Christians, as on September 19 Nādir Bakkār was quoted as rejecting any allegation of Salafists having agitated against Copts, instead insisting that the Salafists had protested with ‘liberals and Copts.” This defence may be understood in the context of Father Fīlūbātir Gamīl ‘Azīz’s criticism (Section 2.3.3.3) and the controversy between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Salafi Front (Section 2.5.2).

So far, the reactions from ʿImād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr and Nādir Bakkār in particular have shown that the Nur Party was put under pressure by the violent reactions and the stances of some radical elements in the party. It is in this context that the efforts to dissociate Copts from this video are to be understood.

Now we will focus on the issue of violence and the demands expressed by both the Nur Party and *al-daʿwa al-salafiyya*; these two aspects ought to shed light on how they tried to use the event of “The Innocence of Muslims” for their political benefit. Firstly, the Nur Party seemed to have unequivocally condemned the violence in reaction to this video. This condemnation was expressed by condemning the violence itself. For instance Nādir Bakkār harshly condemned the killing of the US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, as ‘a criminal and barbarian act that has no relation to the ethics of Islam.”

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238 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 12 September 2012. بكار: قتل السفير الأمريكي بـ"بنى غازى" عمل إجرامى وبربرى. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/12/%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%89-%D8%A8%D9%80%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%89-%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%89-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A5%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%89-%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%89/784088#.VkGvl5OfVJ (retrieved May 23, 2016).
goal of peaceful protests.\footnote{Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 13 September 2012.} In particular, as the assault on the US embassy was linked to a Salafi involvement, especially in Western media (see Section 2.4.1), the Nur Party was careful not to lose its political credentials. In this regard, Nādir Bakkār denied any responsibility in the clashes at the US embassy, instead accusing ‘some sides’ of having an interest in stirring up ‘strife (fitun).’\footnote{Al-Hurra. 19 September 2012.} Interestingly, a leading member of the party, Galāl Marra, called on the reactions to remain ‘within the boundaries of the law and the constitution.’\footnote{Al-Shuruq. 14 September 2012.}

Similarly, the various demands expressed by the party revealed this objective. In particular, throughout the “crisis” of this video, the Nur Party pressured the government significantly and, through the government, it questioned the Muslim Brotherhood’s ability to defend Islam. Firstly, both the Nur Party and al-daʿwa al-salafiyya put pressure on President Muhammad Mursī to take a firm stance towards and to suspend relations with the United States.\footnote{Al-Ahram. 13 September 2012.} In addition, the Nur Party demanded that the Ministry of Interior strip the producers of the film of their Egyptian citizenship.\footnote{Al-Ahram. 13 September 2012.} This demand had already been expressed by Nādir Bakkār in a tweet on September 10.\footnote{Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 10 September 2012.} Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was accused of using the same methods as the regime of Ḥusnī Mubārak.\footnote{Al-Shuruq. 14 September 2012.} Similarly, the spokesman of al-daʿwa al-salafiyya, ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Shāḥḥāt, delivered a speech at the conference “Answer to them” on September 22 in which he said he had reviewed the reactions of President Mursī, the ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ministry of culture, the ministry of Islamic endowments, the ministry of the Media, and concluded that their reactions were below that which was...
‘Yet our political reactions are far better than [in the past],’ ʻAbd al-Munʿim al-Shihḥāt added, since the youth, among them some hooligans, had shown that the issue of offense concerned all Muslims, not only ‘Islamists.’ Finally, the Nur Party was also very vocal in demanding an end to such ‘offenses’ by legal means. For instance, Yasrī Ḥamād called on President Mursī to enshrine the protection of Muhammad in the new constitution. Similarly, in a speech delivered at the conference “The Egyptian Constitution between Reality and Hope” on September 10, Nādir Bakkār expressed the need to enshrine the criminalization of blasphemy in the new constitution. Such an article would reportedly not threaten the freedom of speech. Bakkār’s demand also comprised blasphemy against Christianity, as ‘for example, if a Muslims exposes the Lord Christ (al-sayyid al-masīḥ) to foulness,’ this is defined as a crime, as under Islamic rule it is not ‘permissible to offend any of the prophets sent by God.’ This article of criminalization is justified, according to Nādir Bakkār, by the very nature of Egypt, as the country of ‘noble al-Azhar and of the Egyptian Church.’

Eventually, another hint pointing to the political use of this event is the tweet by Nādir Bakkār following the thwarted assault on the US embassy, asserting that he did not make the US government or the US people responsible for the film, perhaps inspired by the letter from Shāṭir Khayraṭ to The New York Times.

All these statements emphasize the Nur Party’s intention to be recognized as a political leader and powerful political contender. This intention was displayed by two strategies: pressuring President Mursī into taking a firmer stance and employing the discourse of national unity, thus seemingly acknowledging that Christian Egyptians and the Church are part of the Egyptian nation.

In comparison, al-daʿwa al-salafiyya published a long statement on 11 September 2012 in which it condemned “The Innocence of Muslims.” In this statement, however, the video

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248 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 10 September 2012. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/10/%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%8B%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%81-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%81-%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%99-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A3%D9%89-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A9/781106#.VkGvMF5OFVJ (retrieved May 23, 2016).
was not mentioned by its title, but rather described as ‘the production of a film about the life of the prophet (PBUH),’ full of ‘lies and naked scenes,’ ‘these comedies,’ and ‘this attack is not the first one,’ ‘this futility.’ Interestingly, in this statement al-da wa al-salafiyya displayed a good knowledge of the content of the film. For instance, it rejected the allegations made in the video concerning the persecution of Copts in Egypt, insisting instead that the Copts in Egypt ‘live in security and peace, unlike that which the film depicted in its lies.’ In addition, the organization seemed to be aware of the accusations levelled against Muhammad himself, as it views Muhammad’s order in the video to kill the men, women and children as a ‘comparison between jihād in Islam and the holy wars by the Jews,’ during which God allegedly ‘ordered them to kill men, women, children and to disembowel pregnant women.’ In this quotation, al-da wa al-salafiyya adds more cruelty to the war ethics, because the video did not mention the fate of imprisoned pregnant women. As a result, the background ascribed to “The Innocence of Muslims” is interesting, since al-da wa al-salafiyya does state that ‘some idiots among the Copts in the diaspora (aqbāṭ al-mahjar) acted, and behind them one of the American Churches, and behind all of them, the Jews.’ Thus, the organization did concede the involvement of the Coptic network in the United States and is careful not to generalize about all Copts living abroad, but it ascribes complete responsibility to “the Jews.” However, in asserting this, al-da wa al-salafiyya does not rely on the alleged report of Sam Bacile which confused Western media for a few days. Rather, the statement seems to provide evidence by referring to the content of the video, for instance, in the reference to the holy wars in Judaism mentioned above. These ‘biases’ towards Judaism – as termed by al-da wa al-salafiyya – are said to be additional proof of the fact that ‘organizations of Copts in the diaspora’ have become ‘the loot of worldwide Zionism’ and are misguided into believing ‘they defend the cause of the sons of their religion.’ All in all, therefore, the struggle with those behind this video, and alleged “worldwide Zionism” is understood in the framework of early Islam fighting “unbelievers.” Thus the statement makes use of many quotations from the Quran (3:118251 and 8:36-37252) which define the “other” not as Christian or Jewish Non-Muslims but as merely the “other” or, in some

251 “O you who have believed, do not take as intimates those other than yourselves, for they will not spare you [any] ruin. They wish you would have hardship. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater. We have certainly made clear to you the signs, if you will use reason.” Quran. Doi: http://quran.com/3/118 retrieved May 23, 2016.

252 “Indeed, those who disbelieve spend their wealth to avert [people] from the way of Allah. So they will spend it; then it will be for them a [source of] regret; then they will be overcome. And those who have disbelieved – unto Hell they will be gathered. [This is] so that Allah may distinguish the wicked from the good and place the wicked some of them upon others and heap them all together and put them into Hell. It is those who are the losers. Say to those who have disbelieved [that] if they cease, what has previously occurred will be forgiven for them. But if they return [to hostility] – then the precedent of the former [rebellious] peoples has already taken place.” Quran. Doi: http://quran.com/8/36 (retrieved May 23, 2016).
instances, the “unbeliever” who challenges the Muslim in his faith. Thus, these quotations are used to back al-daʾwa al-salafiyya’s understanding of this video’s purpose; stopping the spread of Islam. In this regard, al-daʾwa al-salafiyya is especially suspicious about the timing of this video, as it coincides with ‘the Islamic peoples’ siding with the Islamic project in the first true choice.’ Yet the organization is certain that the spread of Islam actually increases every time such ‘attacks’ take place. However, according to the organization, this certainty does not free Muslims from their duty to defend Islam as stated in the suras 48:9, 9:40 and 22:40.

Moreover, al-daʾwa al-salafiyya pressurized President Mursī and the whole government into taking a firm stance in connection to this video. According to the organization, the duty of the president was to protect the identity of the umma. In addition, the organization defined tasks for every ministry, including the ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the ministry of Information and the ministry of Islamic endowments.

Lastly, we will focus on how the statement of 11 September 2012 dealt with the issue of Coptic involvement. The statement oscillates between a balanced outlook and al-daʾwa al-salafiyya’s usual stance towards Copts. For instance, its leader, Yāsir al-Burhāmī, concluded in 2011 that ‘the Nazarenes (al-naṣārā) do not recognize (kafara) the Quran,’ and accused them of being responsible for the massacre of Maspero on 9 October 2011.253 The statement in reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims” used both the terms “Nazarenes” (‘al-naṣrāniyya,’ ‘miṣrī naṣrānī’) and “Copt” (“many of the church and political and popular Coptic leaders”), but it did not use once the word “Christian” i.e. “masiḥī,” a more neutral term. “Al-naṣrānī” refers to the word used in the Quran, whereas the word “Copts” designates these Christians as belonging to Egypt. Besides this, the statement was very careful indeed when mentioning the Coptic involvement in this video; it suggests the involvement of ‘idiots among the Copts in the diaspora’ who ‘without doubt do not represent all Nazarene Egyptians’ and praises the condemnations issued by key actors and Churches in Egypt. Interestingly, al-daʾwa al-salafiyya denies the existence of interreligious conflicts and instead emphasizes the peaceful coexistence.

**Summary of Section 2.3.1.2**

Overall, this statement is very surprising because it presents an elaborate analysis of the content and background of the video. It admitted the involvement of ‘some’ Copts but established a Jewish responsibility within the framework of early Islam’s struggle against disbelief. It shows an unusually accommodating stance towards Christians while displaying a
tension between a religious outlook on the one hand and the political and social reality on the other.

2.3.1.3 *Al-Gamāʿa al-Islāmiyya* and the Building and Development Party

Of all the Islamist movements and parties that reacted to “The Innocence of Muslims,” the stance of ḥizb al-bināʾ wa l-tanniya, Building and Development Party, the political arm of *al-gamāʿa al-Islāmiyya*, is the most surprising, as this movement had a long history of violence and animosity towards Copts. In the 1980s *al-gamāʿa al-Islāmiyya* was responsible for a number of attacks on Copts in Upper Egypt. Several leaders were imprisoned, among them Ṭāriq al-Zumur and ‘Abbūd al-Zumur, for plotting to assassinate President Anwar al-Sādāt. While in prison, the leadership of *al-gamāʿa al-Islāmiyya* announced an end to all violence in 1999 (Rashwan 2007, 314-318). According to Diaa Rashwan, however, the movement continued to consider Christians and Jews “unbelievers” who must be treated well (Rashwan 2007, 356). Following the revolution of 25 January 2011, the leaders of *al-gamāʿa al-Islāmiyya* were released and founded a political party. There are, however, conflicting indications as to when this party, ḥizb al-bināʾ wa l-tanniya (Building and Development Party), was created. According to *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, the party was established in March 2011.254 According to the Carnegie Endowment the party was founded in June 2011.255 During the parliamentary elections in 2011/2012 the party formed an alliance with other Salafi parties, among them the Nur Party, and won thirteen seats (Lacroix 2012, 1).

The most interesting aspect about the reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” is the both ambivalent and surprising stance towards Copts. On the one hand, Copts were heavily criticized for their alleged financial support by the West to allow them to spread a “persecution discourse” about the Copts in Egypt. On the other hand, the party attempted to completely dissociate Coptic Egyptians from this video. For instance, the head of the political office of the Building and Development Party, Ṣafwat ῤ Abd al-Ghanī, described the producers of the video as working for ‘suspicious sides, which neither represent the Copts in Egypt nor Christianity (masīḥiyya) nor Copts in the diaspora.’256 This idea is repeated again when referring to the alleged funding of Copts in the US by the US.257 Similarly, Ṭāriq al-Zumur expressed the need to differentiate between “internal” and “external” Copts, accusing Copts in the diaspora of

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256 *Al-Ahram*. 12 September 2012. إصدار فيلم مسيء للرسول يثير غضب شعبي من الإساءة للرسول. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.

‘igniting strife (fitna).’ These statements contrast sharply with the previous history of al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya. In addition, “The Innocence of Muslims” was also mistaken for a ‘Dutch film’ by the general secretary of the party in Sūhāg, who viewed Muhammad as a red line Muslims would not allow to be crossed and again expressed the demand for a reaction by the Egyptian government. He denied that the video was an expression of freedom of speech (ibid). Furthermore, Ṭāriq al-Zumur criticized the violence, underlining the importance of appearing ‘civilized and bearing the spirit of the January 25 Revolution.’

Summary of Section 2.3.1.3

These reactions suggest that the Building and Development Party tried to enter the political game following the Arab Spring and intended, like the Nur Party, to establish itself as a serious political contender. Thus, defending Christians against potential backlashes was part of this “game.”

2.3.1.4 Salafi-Jihadi Reactions

Finally, this chapter will close with the reaction of two Salafi-Jihadi leaders who quite interestingly directed their criticism mainly towards the majority Muslim countries in general and Egypt in particular. In a special declaration to al-Maṣrī al-Yawm, the leader of the Jihad Organization (tanẓīm al-jihād), shaykh Nabīl Naʿīm, stated that President Muḥammad Mursī failed to meet the expectations of the people – meaning himself – and that he had expected him to take a firm stance. Similarly, Hishām Abāẓa, founder of the Safety and Development Party (ḥizb al-salāma wa l-tanmiya), the political arm of the Jihad Organization, viewed this ‘offense’ as a symptom of the umma’s current state of weakness.

Summary of Section 2.3.1

Overall, these reactions from various political Islamist actors and organizations, whose positions all differed greatly, showed the competition there was in the newly democratic Egypt. All of them displayed the intention to act and be recognized as serious political contenders.

258 Al-Hurra. 19 September 2012.
259 Copts Today. 11 September 2012.
262 Masress. 27 August 2012.
263 Al-Masry al-Youm. 11 September 2012.
especially when putting pressure on President Mursī. Moreover, even the mother organizations displayed an effort to prevent backlashes against Christians by dissociating them from the video or not mentioning them.

2.3.2 Islamic Preachers

This short section comprises the reactions of those “Islamic preachers” who did not have leading positions in Salafi organizations such as Yāsir al-Burhāmī in al-da‘wā al-salafiyya, or on Salafi channels, like Wisām ‘Abd al-Warāth. Thus, this section will dwell on the reactions of al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī al-Jafarī, Abū Yaḥyā, Ṣafwat Hijāzī and Mabrūk ‘Aṭiya. In addition, the reactions of two other Islamic preachers, Sha‘bān Darwīsh and Ashraf Muḥammad Muḥmūd, given during a joint Christian-Muslim conference will be analysed in Chapter 2.4.

Al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī al-Jafarī was born in 1971 in Jeddah and is of Yemeni extraction. In 2006 he was a signatory of the open letter “A Common Word” under the leadership of King Abdallah II of Jordan (see Chapter 5). In the context of the ongoing discussion in Egypt on the permissibility of offering Christians Christmas greetings, al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī al-Jafarī asserted that he did offer them his greetings, stating that the fatwā forbidding this was based neither on the Quran nor on the sunna.264 On 10 September 2012, Copts Today quoted the preacher’s reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims,” describing it as a ‘film offending our Lord Muhammad (PBUH),’ produced by some extremists amongst the ‘Copts in the diaspora’ to stir up ‘sectarian strife in Egypt,’ and, from there on, in the whole region.265 In addition, he praised the position of the ‘eminent Coptic Orthodox Church’ and the raising of this issue by a Coptic lawyer. Furthermore, al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī al-Jafarī defined the best reaction as follows ‘that the world sees in us the practical realization of his [Muhammad’s] ethics, and that the untruth of what has been produced appears.’ He also called on President Barack Obama to issue a law forbidding ‘racism and incitement to hate.’

Similarly, on 10 September 2012, al-Maṣrī al-Yawm reported the reaction from the Islamic preacher shaykh Abū Yaḥyā, presented here as a member of the executive committee of i’tilāf sawt al-hikma (Coalition of the Voice of Wisdom) which was established in connection with this video.266 In this declaration, Abū Yaḥyā expressed the need for several actors to take a firm stance on “The Innocence of Muslims;” he especially called on President Mursī to take

a firm official stance. Equally, Abū Yahyā called on the highest ‘ulamā’ of Al-Azhar to issue a statement condemning the video and a fatwā. Abū Yahyā also requested that ‘the church distance herself from the producers and the promoters of the film’ and support the calls to strip the producers of their citizenship in order to prevent ‘strife between Muslim and Coptic Egyptians.’ Finally, he emphasized that the protest at the US embassy would be peaceful.

Ṣafwat Hijāzī is said to have been close to al-gamā’a al-islāmiyya and was elected a member of the National Council of Human Rights (al-majlis al-qawmī li-huqūq al-insān).267 In his appearance on a TV show reported in al-Yawm al-Sābi’ on 15 September 2012, Ṣafwat Hijāzī placed the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims” in the context of the efforts to crush the Revolution of 25 January 2011.268 He stated that given these ‘enemies’ inability to target the revolution directly, ‘they hate the revolution, and therefore they undertake to distort the image of Islamic symbols.’ Interestingly, Ṣafwat Hijāzī completely reframed the revolution as an Islamic and republican overthrow of which he is a symbol. He stated that he was proud to ‘represent the Islamic project and the revolution of January.’ He also recalled that Muḥammad Mursī would implement Sharia Law as he had promised but that this needed some time. He defended Mursī’s alleged passivity during the issue of this video and directed his own accusations against the kings of Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. In addition, he formulated an implicit call to kill Mūrīs Ṣādiq, ‘I do not issue a fatwa allowing the killing of Mūrīs Ṣādiq, but my emotion leads me to murder him.’ Lastly, Waṭanī reported the stance of the preacher Mabrūk Ṭātiya.269 He was born in al-Minūffiya, went to an al-Azhar school, graduated from the faculty of Arabic language and started a show on television.270 With regards to the background of the video, Ṭātiya seemed to concede a Coptic involvement; the video was reportedly produced by ‘a group of humankind, be it from within the Copts in the diaspora (aqbāṭ al-mahjar) or others,’ but mostly he described the producers as ‘enemies of the nation (waṭan).’ Like other reactions, he viewed the video’s aim as seeking to produce ‘strife’ and ‘spread chaos in society.’ In addition, he stated that ‘Islam

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267 Moheet. 28 December 2012. Doi: http://www.moheet.com/2012/12/28/1706787/%d8%B9%d9%84%d9%89-%d8%A7%d9%84%d9%87%d9%88%d8%A7%d8%A1-%d8%B5%d9%81%d9%88%d8%AA-%d8%AD-%d8%AC-%d8%A7-%d8%B2-%d9%8A-%d9%8A-%d8%B5-%d8%A7-%d9%84-%d8%AD-%d8%A7-%d9%84-%d9%85-%d8%B3-%d9%8A-%d8%AD-%d9%8A.html#.Vq86hXnFb1V (retrieved May 23, 2016).


and the Messenger are higher that th[is] pettiness.’

2.3.3 Coptic Organizations

Since a number of Coptic organizations reacted to “The Innocence of Muslims,” this paragraph will start by looking first at the Coptic activism that gradually emerged in the final years of Mubarak’s regime and was institutionalized following the revolution of 25 January 2011.

2.3.3.1 The Emergence of Coptic Activism

As the opposition to Ḥusnī Mubārak gradually increased, two phenomena took place at the same time. A number of Christian politicians and activists joined movements opposing Mubārak such as the Kefaya movement (ḥarakat kīfāya) and April 6 Movement (ḥarakat 6 aбрīl). At the same time, a Coptic activism gradually emerged that questioned both the Church’s tutelage and the state’s dealings with Coptic Egyptians. Among the Christians who joined the Kefaya movement were, for instance, (Coptic Catholic) George ʻIṣḥāq who then co-founded the Dustour Party, Jamāl As’ad who would reject the appellation ‘Egyptian Christian,’ and Hānī al-Gazirī (Casper 2014). In 2009 Hānī al-Gazirī founded the Coptic organization aqbāṭ min ajl mīṣr (Copts for Egypt) with the aim of attracting the attention of the state and formulated two demands: the establishment of a single law and the suppression of the reconciliation gatherings. In the meantime, several events illustrated the gradual emancipation of the Coptic youth from the tutelage of the Church, in particular from Pope Shinūda III. These events began with the attack in Najʿ Ḥammādī at Christmas in January 2010 when the Copts subsequently protested for the first time outside the walls of the church. In reaction to this attack Hānī al-Gazirī staged a protest on Tahrir Square on 14 February 2010. Al-Gazirī emphasized the importance of the protest taking place outside the church, as its echoes would carry further; ‘I am Egyptian. I have a right to do that [protest]’ (al-Gazeri 23 January 2015). The second core event was the violent clash between Coptic protesters and the police in al-ʼUmrāniyya in November 2010, after which Copts reportedly stormed the headquarters of the governorate of Gizeh. The bombing in Alexandria on 6 January 2011 killed twenty people and marked a new level of turnout, as youths interrupted a church leader who wanted to thank Ḥusnī Mubārak (Sedra 2012b). Furthermore, young Copts threw stones at the cars of the shaykh al-Azhar, the

271 Al-Ahram. ??, (retrieved January 31, 2015).
272 Al-Gaziri, Hani. 23 January 2015. Personal Interview. Cairo. This source is quoted in this chapter as “al-Gazeri 23 January 2015.”
muftī, and the minister of Islamic endowments following a press conference with Pope Shinūda. Despite the Pope’s calls to the contrary, young Copts participated in the protests of the revolution in January 2011. This participation reflected the will to take part as Egyptians and as Copts.

However, the attacks on Copts and churches did not cease after the revolution, so Coptic activism was gradually institutionalized and a number of Coptic organizations emerged; in particular, the Coalition of Egypt’s Copts (ʾilāf aqbāṭ mīṣr), the Maspero Youth Union (ittihād shabāb Maspero), the Movement of Copts Without Restrictions (ḥarakat aqbāṭ bilā quyūd), and the Christian Brothers. The Coalition of Egypt’s Copts was reportedly founded on 25 February 2011 and, according to its secretary general, Fādī Yusif, is the only Coptic organization that includes Muslims, in particular those from al-Azhar and the Cairo University. The Maspero Youth Union (ittihād shabāb Maspero) was reportedly founded following the events of ʿAffī, 80 kilometers from Cairo, where a love affair between a Christian man and a Muslim woman led to the expulsion of the Christians. According to Mīnā Maģdī, general coordinator of the Union, these expelled Christian inhabitants staged a sit-in in Maspero Square – which became a parallel protest place to Tahrir Square for specific Christian demands – that ended on 25 March 2011 and it was then that the Maspero Youth Union was created (ibid). After the Maspero massacre on 9 October 2011, the union was heavily criticized by the families of the victims and was accused of being ‘corrupt and suspicious.’ The movement was also reportedly a merger of different groups, amongst them the group associated with the magazine al-katība al-ṭibiyya, whose chief editor was Father Filūbatīr (Casper 2011). The priest Filūbatīr Gamīl ʿAzīz founded the journal al-katība al-ṭibiyya in 2004 together with another priest, Father Mityās. The magazine was distributed in churches and called on Copts to preserve their Coptic Egyptian identity in the face of Arabization and Islamization (Casper 2013, 5). The organization Copts Without Restrictions (ḥarakat aqbāṭ bilā quyūd) was also founded following the revolution of 25 January 2011 (Casper 2013). In August 2012, several Coptic movements merged into the Coptic Community Council (al-majlis al-mustasharī al-qibṭī) to present a united Coptic front (Casper 2013, 7) under the leadership of Hānī al-Gazīrī.

276 Maģdī, Mīnā. 21 January 2015. Personal Interview. Cairo. This source is quoted in this section as “Maģdī 21 January 2015.”
These organizations’ calls ranged from demands for full citizenship to more sectarian demands. All movements shared the same goal of reducing the Church’s political role and limiting it to religious matters. Another main issue was the sectarian dimension. For instance, the creation of the Christian Brothers (al-ikhwān al-masīḥiyūn) in July 2012 as a reaction to the presidency of Muḥammad Mursī was seen as a significant and dangerous step towards sectarianism in Egypt. Gamāl As’ad expressed his worries:

Une telle association n’est sûrement pas dans l’intérêt des coptes, au contraire elle fait l’affaire des islamistes radicaux qui prônent un État religieux [...] si les coptes aspirent à un État civil basé sur la citoyenneté, il faut qu’ils se considèrent comme Egyptiens non comme une monirté chrétienne.

Yet the movement’s leader, Mīkhāʾīl Fahmī asserted that the movement’s aim was precisely to ground and revive the concept of citizenship. Overall, all activists shared the will to preserve a specific Coptic identity while still being Egyptians. As Hānī al-Gazirī explained: ‘We, Copts, were here before the Christians […]’ and differentiated Christian religious belonging from Coptic nationality, concluding that, in fact, all Egyptians are Copts and not Arabs (al-Gazeri 23 January 2015).

However, the aftermath of the “Revolution of 30 June 2013” dealt a severe blow to these organizations. In June 2014, Hānī al-Gazirī announced the dissolution of his movement, and urged Copts to ‘dissolve back into society’ (Casper 2014). He put particular faith in President al-Sīsī, with whom he was ‘of one mind’ and considered Coptic activism as becoming harmful to some extent; ‘the ideas of “Christian” and “Muslim” must absolutely be erased in the minds of the people: there will only remain an Egyptian. I am Egyptian. Am I a minority in Egypt? No’ (al-Gazeri 23 January 2015). This decision was criticized by other Coptic activists (Casper 2014). As to the other organizations, Copts Without Restrictions might have dissolved since the revolution of 30 June 2013 (Magdi 21 January 2015), while the Maspero Youth Union is reportedly riven by internal divisions and has lost importance. According to Jayson Casper, the Coalition of Egypt’s Copts has remained more important as it is more pro-church and pro-regime compared to the other groups (Casper 17 January 2015).

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280 Casper, Jayson. 17 January 2015. Personal Interview. Cairo. This source is quoted in this chapter as “Casper 17 January 2015.”
2.3.3.2 Reactions of the Coptic Activists

This section will analyse the reaction of four movements and one person; Copts Without Restrictions (ḥarakat aqbāṭ bilā quyūd), the Maspero Youth Union (ittiḥād shabāb Maspero), the coalition of Egypt’s Copts (i’itilāf aqbāṭ miṣr), the Coptic Community Council (al-majlis al-mustashārī al-qibṭī), and Hānī al-Gazirī.

On 10 September, al-Balad mentioned a statement made by the organization Copts Without Restrictions. This statement was published before the protest at the US embassy on 11 September 2012. The coordinator of the movement, Shārif Ramzī, who did not participate in the protests at the US embassy, began by condemning ‘all forms of attacks on sacred items as well as insulting sacred symbols and offending the feelings of our Muslim brothers.’ However, the statement then proceeded to denounce what it called the ‘double standards’ of Egyptian society, of the state, and the media. Copts Without Restrictions asked: ‘Why are these voices not raised to condemn more extremist positions of institutions and the media in Egypt against the Christians and their sacred items and symbols?’ The statement particularly criticized the silence of society, the state, and the media when Christians are accused of being ‘unbelievers’ and their properties and lives are attacked. Interestingly, to back its argument, the organization employed the discourse of national unity: Shārif Ramzī considered this hypocrisy a threat to national unity. This reaction might have been motivated by accusations from the media directed at the Copts. Overall, Copts Without Restrictions did not discuss the background of the video or the involvement of Copts.

In contrast, the positions of the Maspero Youth Union seem to be much more accommodating. On 11 September 2012, al-Balad published a statement by the movement and on 12 September 2012, al-Ahrām quoted its spokesman. In its first statement, the movement, which participated in the protest at the US embassy on the evening of September 11 2012, discussed the background of “The Innocence of Muslims” extensively. Like that of Copts Without Restrictions, the statement started by condemning the video, ‘the offense against any revealed religion.’ Subsequently, Magdī Ṣābir, who is presented here as the group’s official spokesman, questioned the background and the identity of those involved in the video; an ‘irresponsible group,’ a ‘paid group,’ ‘we do not know where the funding comes from for this offending film or the group funding them.’ The Maspero Youth Union questioned the very...
possibility of the producers’ being Egyptians, since the Copts living abroad are ‘true Egyptians’ and therefore it is not possible for them to ‘offend Islam and the Messenger.’ Accordingly, the producers only expressed ‘their personal views and not the views of all Copts in Egypt and outside of Egypt.’ In particular, the statement focused on a possible outcome of the video, an ‘attempt to stir sectarian strife (fitna tā’ifiyya).’ Similarly, in an interview with the author, Mīnā Magdī asserted that the condemnation was not directed at the principle of freedom of speech but at the likely results of this ‘film’ (Magdi 21 January 2015). This fear was also displayed in the stance reported by al-Ahrām on 12 September 2012.284 In this article, Nādir Shukrī is presented as the spokesman of the movement and quoted as accusing “The Innocence of Muslims” of ‘threaten[ing] social peace and increase[s] tension between the sons of the united nation.”285

In comparison, the two stances taken by the Coalition of Egypt’s Copts were much more accommodating than that of the Maspero Youth Union and even than that of the Copts Without Restrictions. On 12 September 2012, al-Balad published a statement by the Coalition and on that same day Copts Today evoked the intervention by Fādī Yusif on television. Al-Balad wrote that i’tilāf aqūbāt miṣr published a statement condemning the video on Tuesday 11 September 2012,286 the same day the movement officially participated in the protest at the US embassy. In addition, al-Masrī al-Yawm also mentions this statement.287 According to al-Balad, “The Innocence of Muslims” was described as ‘an American production,’ as ‘intellectual terror’ whose background is uncertain and which aims to ‘stir discord between all believers of religions.’ Therefore, the organization called for the punishment of those involved (al-Masry al-Youm 11 September 2012), an internationalization of laws criminalizing blasphemy, and also request that the Egyptian government strip the makers of this video of their Egyptian citizenship (al-Balad 12 September 2012). However, the Coalition condemned the violence in connection to this video, stating ‘it is a right to defend one’s creed but in a peaceful, legal way.’ Similarly, it demanded that the offenses against Christianity should also be punished (al-Masry al-Youm 11 September 2012). In an interview on a television channel, Fādī Yusif first tried to dissociate “The Innocence of Muslims” from its Coptic content and background.288 Thus the film was,

284 Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012. غضب شعبي من الإساءة للرسول. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.
285 “يبدع السلام الاجتماعي ويزيد الأخفاف بين أبناء الوطن الواحد.”
according to Fādī Yūsif, an American and Dutch production dating back to July 2012 to which the sequence about the Coptic doctor had been added later, in order to connect the video with contemporary Egypt and prove the persecution of Copts (ibid). Moreover, Yūsif asserted that the reference to the Jews on the Arabian Peninsula in the video was a clear hint at its “Jewish background” (ibid). Secondly, speaking in the name of Christians in Egypt, he pointed to their condemnation of this video, and the fact that they had condemned the video before Muslims did. Interestingly, Fādī Yūsif again directed the blame towards Copts in the diaspora who have a long history of ‘stirring discord.’

In a very brief statement published on 12 September 2012, the Coptic Community Council (al-majlis al-mustashârī al-qibṭī) condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” as aiming to ignite a ‘battle between the sons of the united nation.’ Its president, Hānī al-Gazirī, participated in the rather low-ranking Christian-Muslim conference “Only the Messenger of God” on 19 September in Zamalek which was organized in cooperation with the hay’at qidâyyât al-dawla. In his speech, Hānī al-Gazirī insisted that “The Innocence of Muslims” harmed all Egyptians. Firstly, he stated: ‘all of us Egyptians, Muslims and Christians, witness difficult conditions’ and ‘the Copts of Egypt condemned the offense against the noble Messenger.’ He stated that Mūrīs Šādiq has been harming Copts for years and, since ‘he is not one of us,’ ‘I will not apologize in the name of the Copts of Egypt.’ Instead, al-Gazirī asserted that the video aimed to divide Egypt, therefore ‘a vision of prudence and national outlook’ are allegedly needed. Moreover, he recalled that Christianity commanded Christians to love their enemies, as if he were criticizing the violent reactions.

2.3.3.3 Father Filūbātīr Gamīl ’Azīz

On 12 September 2011, Copts Today published a long statement by Father Filūbātīr Gamīl ’Azīz discussing the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims.” In his statement, Filūbātīr Gamīl ’Azīz wrote that the main drive for writing this statement were people asking him for his opinion. However, the priest asserted that he systematically referred to the Coptic Orthodox
Church’s official statement. Although he condemned the video as a ‘suspicious work’ and an ‘evil conspiracy,’ he initially denied the Coptic involvement in it. Instead he asserted that the producer of *The Da Vinci Code* was the same person who produced “The Innocence of Muslims.” Therefore, the priest asked: ‘Why it is said that the film was made by Copts in the diaspora? Why did Mūrīs Ṣādiq let himself get involved in this?’ He also questioned the timing of this controversy, since the video had been on YouTube for two months. Secondly, Filūbātir Gamīl ‘Azīz criticized several Islamic actors; he criticized the shaykh al-Azhar and the muftī for getting involved by issuing *fatwā*.

Furthermore, he accused the Muslim Brotherhood and President Mursī of ‘play[ing] with fire, and they will be the first ones to get burnt’ as well as of using ‘extremist *shuyūkh* and some extremist Christians outside of Egypt.’ In addition, he also criticized a number of Islamic preachers, including Yāsir al-Burhāmī, for their recent attacks on Christianity. Thus, as the so-called Abu Islam burnt a bible on that same day, he concluded by asking ‘Are we to expect a terrorist act against the church in Egypt, especially on the coming Friday?’

### 2.3.3.4 Gamāl Asʿad: Countering the Conspiracy against the Copts

For Gamāl Asʿad “The Innocence of Muslims” seemed to have been an opportunity to promote his views on the ‘Coptic issue.’ In his conversation on 11 September 2012 with Khālid Ṣalāḥ on al-Nahar TV, he stated that the ‘film’ served ‘Zionist plans’ to divide the Arab countries as had previously happened in Iraq, Sudan, Syria and Lebanon. He seemed to acknowledge the involvement of Mūrīs Ṣādiq, since he explained Ṣādiq’s view that Egypt was colonized by Islam and needed to be freed because Copts are persecuted. Gamāl Asʿad therefore denied any connection between the ‘film’ and the Church. More generally, he asserted that the problems of the Christians in Egypt had nothing to do with religion but are linked to ‘social relations with Muslims’ meaning that the ‘Islamic stream rules the majority in the street’ and would therefore not be solved by the new constitution. In addition, he expressed a need for the appellation “Copts in the diaspora (*aqbāṭ al-mahjar*)” to be regulated.

Moreover, Gamāl Asʿad also participated in the conference entitled “No to Stirring Strife … Yes, to Supporting the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)” which was organized by the Association of Lawyers, alongside Bishop Mārtīrūs; a delegate of the Faculty of Law of the University of Banī Swīf, Dr. Muḥammad `Abd al-Ẓāhir; and a member of the Association of

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292 Al-Yawm al-Sabī, 11 September 2012. التفاصيل المؤسسات الدينية ضد الفيلم المسيء للرسول: "الأزهر": الداعون لإنتاجه هدفهم إشعال الفتنة.. "الإفتاء": ليس من الحرية ويمس أقدس رمز للمسلمين.. و"أقباط المهجر": نتبرأ من موريس صادق وزقلمة.
Lawyers, Ībrāhīm Īliyās. For Gamāl Asʿad, this conference again offered an opportunity to dwell on his views about Copts. In particular, he explained in his speech how the West ‘played by [using] the Coptic card’ during the Crusades and during the French and British colonization. In this context, he asserted that the ‘concept of minority’ was used as a propaganda tool to bring about submission and to ‘interfere in the affairs of the state’ with the goal of ‘emptying Egypt of its Copts.’ Furthermore, he stated that both Muslims and Copts emigrate to improve their economic situation. He conceded that ‘Copts have a right to defend themselves but in a political framework and not a sectarian one.’ In addition, he called on the Muslim Brotherhood, given that they now rule Egypt, to solve the problems of the Copts quickly. With regards to “The Innocence of Muslims,” Asʿad said that it was an ‘evil’ and not an ‘offense,’ since, as he sees it, religious symbols and creeds cannot possibly be offended.

Similarly, in his telephone call to the program “Studio al-Balad,” he repeated his view of “The Innocence of Muslims” as part of the clash of civilizations brought about the United States by means of the issue of religious minorities in the Muslim world. Interestingly, Asʿad considered the film to be aiming to draw Copts (and not Muslims) into ‘strife, but fortunately this did not work out,’ ‘we must not give this opportunity to Mūris Ṣādiq.’

2.3.3.5 The Coptic Lay Council of Asyūṭ

On 12 September 2012, al-Sharq al-ʿArabī mentioned the statement by the Coptic Lay Council (al-majlis al-millī) of Asyūṭ. In addition to its condemnation of this ‘offense and contempt of religions,’ the statement referred to many aspects of the statement made by the Coptic Orthodox Church, whose position it mentioned in the declaration, in particular its disowning of the video. The Lay Council also underlined the timing of this crisis and pointed out that the “film” had been shown only once in an empty cinema.

2.3.3.6 Other Coptic Organizations’ Reactions

In this last section, we will describe the reactions of different Coptic organizations...

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293 Al-Yawm al-Sabī. 13 September 2012. مطالب بخطب موريس صادق من نقابة المحامين.. مؤتمر "لا لإثارة الفتنة" يطرح وثيقة. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/13/%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1_%D9%84%D8%A7_%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9_%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AD_%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9_%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%89_%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86/784864#.VjszJF5OvVJ (retrieved May 23, 2016).


295 Al-Sharq al-Arabi. 12 September 2012. ردود فعل شعبية وعربيّة ودولية على فيلم الأسِاءة للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أعضاء المجلس الملي: "لا لإثارة الفتنة" يطرح وثيقة. Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/13/%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1_%D9%84%D8%A7_%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9_%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AD_%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9_%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%89_%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86/784864#.VjszJF5OvVJ (retrieved May 23, 2016).
whose focuses range from charity to human rights. These organizations are the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, the Central Committee for National Awareness, the Coptic Association for Reconciliation and Stability, and the Movement for Civil Rights for Christians.

On 14 September 2012, *al-Ahrām* mentioned the reaction issued by the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (*hayʾat al-qibṭiyya al-injīliyya li l-khadamāt al-ījtimāʿīyya*) whose president, Andrea Zakī, is the reverend of the Episcopal Church in Heliopolis and wrote a book *The Copts and the Revolution*. This Organization is one of the largest charity organizations in Egypt and was founded by Samuel Ḥabīb, the late father of Rafiq Ḥabīb (Casper 2012), then vice secretary general of the Freedom and Justice Party. The organization expresses its ‘total rejection of any attempt to violate the prophets and the revealed (samāwiyya) creeds,’ it also stated that ‘freedom does not mean affecting the other.’

On 12 September 2012, *al-Shurūq* published the reaction from the Central Committee for the National Awareness of Copts, in Alexandria (*al-lajna al-markaziyya li l-tawʿiyya al-waṭaniyya*) which is an organization gathering lay people from all political streams. This organization aims to separating religious institutions from politics and to draw Copts into political activism. The statement from this movement was particularly critical of the alleged background; i.e. the statement by the “High Authority of the Coptic State” and Mūrīs Ṣādiq, a ‘thumpingly sectarian person,’ of whom ‘all know that he is an Israeli agent aiming to offend Copts in Egypt and outside of Egypt.’ Therefore, the organization asked: ‘How after this history, can the Copts in the diaspora bear [responsibility] for his acts of thumping?’ However, the organization conceded that such an act was expected to ‘inflame strife inside and outside of the country’ in this climate. Therefore, the condemnation of the ‘three Christian communities’ is natural as it ‘offends Christianity before it offends Islam.’

Similarly, *al-Shurūq* quoted the reaction by Imīl Dariyās, a member of the Coptic Association for Reconciliation and Stability (*jamʿiyyat al-tawfīq wa l-thabāt*), a charitable organization, also in Alexandria, emphasizing that ‘Īṣmat Zuqlama and Mūrīs Ṣādiq ‘do not

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296 Al-Ahram. 14 September 2012.
298 Al-Shuruq. 12 September 2012.
299 Copts United. 14 April 2012.
300 Facebook. 
301 Watani. 3 October 2015.
represent Copts and they do not have any connection to the Coptic people,’ and ‘we are not responsible for any person offending the Copts, he only represents himself.’ Like the preceding statement, this argumentation takes the offenses of Copts as a starting point to irrefutably prove that Copts had no connection whatsoever to this.

Finally, the movement of Civil Rights for Christians (ḥarakat li ḥuqūq al-madaniyya li l.masīḥyyīn) stated that it had learnt through the media of the existence of a ‘film offending Islam and his prophet and accusing the so-called Copts in the diaspora.’ It recalled that the film had already been uploaded onto YouTube in July and that in the US, Europe, and other ‘developed’ countries, Western governments did not interfere in cinema productions. The organization viewed the goal as seeking to draw international attention to Egypt and show that it was an ‘Islamist and terrorist state and connect Egypt to terrorism and Islamophobia.’ Interestingly, the fears of backlashes against Copts are made explicit here, unlike in other statements; Civil Rights for Christians rejected the ‘insults and threats directed towards Christian Egyptians who did not participate, either directly or indirectly, in the production of this offending film.’ This reaction has a non-sectarian tone. This organization was established in 2011 and it is a youth organization for human rights promoting a civil state. It states that there is discrimination against and marginalization of Copts.

Summary of Section 2.3.3
The content of these reactions varies greatly. Yet some Coptic organizations and actors tended to be much more critical than other actors (the churches and political parties) with regards to different issues; Egyptian society’s stance on “offense,” the violence in reaction to the video, and the possibility of backlashes against Christians.

2.3.4 Political Parties and Organizations
This section focuses on the reactions of parties and organizations which are not the Muslim Brotherhood, the al-da’wa al-salafiyya, al-gamā’a al-islāmiyya or their political arms.

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%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84 %D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84 %D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9- %D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%85/365229/ (retrieved May 23, 2016).

302 Al-Shuruq. 12 September 2012.

303 Masress. 12 September 2012.

Thus, while some of the parties and organizations analysed in this chapter do have an Islamic focus, some are secular.

### 2.3.4.1 Political Parties

First we will look at the political parties. These parties are organized according to the date of their formation, that is to say, prior to or in the aftermath of revolution of 25 January 2011. This is motivated by the question of whether this had an impact. Another focus of interest is whether members of a Christian party reacted more extensively. Overall, these parties were politically rather insignificant after the revolution when compared to the Freedom and Justice Party and the Nur Party; the New Wafd Party reached 7.6% (38 seats), the Egyptian Bloc, an alliance composed of several parties, 6.8% (34 seats) and Wasat party 2% (10 seats).305

First of all, we will look at the Wafd Party (ḥizb al-wafd), the Reform and Development Party (ḥizb al-islāh wa l-tanmya), the Communist Party (ḥizb al-shīyā ṭ), the Wasat Party (ḥizb al-wasaṭ) and at ʿAmr Mūsā.

With regards to “The Innocence of Muslims,” the Wafd Party306 was merely mentioned by al-ʾAhrām on 13 September 2012 as ‘insisting (akkada)’ that the purpose of the film was to destabilize the region and ‘harm its national interests.’307

The reaction from the Reform and Development Party’s general secretary, Muḥammad Anwar Ismāʿīl, was also brief; he ‘insisted (akkada)” that ‘creative and artistic freedom does not mean offending sacred items (muqaddasāt) and religious creeds,’ and therefore demanded the punishment of the producers and an end to screening of this video (assuming that the film was shown in American cinemas).309

Similarly, al-ʾAhrām mentioned the Communist Party’s reaction on 14 September as ‘insisting (akkada) on its complete respect for religions’ and rejecting ‘religious and sectarian rivalry.’ Furthermore, the party demanded those behind the video be countered in order to ‘preserve the...
nation.  

The Wasat Party’s reaction consisted of an announcement on 17 September of its drafting of a law aimed at ‘forbidding incitement against religions.’

In contrast Ṭāhir Thānī’s reaction, which was published on 12 September in al-Masrī al-Yawm, was more elaborate. Al-Masrī al-Yawm mentions Thānī’s description of “The Innocence of Muslims” as ‘the production of a huge cinematographic work exposing the life of the noble Messenger as well as the civilizational and cultural message of Islam,’ ‘the attempts to offend the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the film offending the noble Messenger,’ ‘these behaviors’ and ‘its racist position and calls for religious fragmentation.’ Interestingly, Ṭāhir Thānī viewed Islam not only as a religion but also as a civilization. In addition, he rejected the pretense of freedom of speech justifying the production of such a ‘film,’ but instead criticized it for spreading ‘chaos, fragmentation and [...] feelings of hatred and strife,’ ‘inflaming a racist, religious and sectarian spirit’ and threatening the stability of societies. In doing so, he rejected the genuine legitimization of freedom of speech and rather underlined the negative impact of such actions. Furthermore, Ṭāhir Thānī called on ‘all intellectuals and followers of different religions to take a clear position.’ That this demand for solidarity and show of loyalty is directed implicitly towards Christians is interesting.

We will now analyse the reactions of those parties that were founded in the aftermath of the revolution, even though some of their leading members may have been active prior to 2011 and can to some extent be considered as “filūl,” remnants of the former regime. These parties are Ḥamdīn Šabbāḥī, ḥizb misr al-qawmī, the Free Egyptian Party (ḥizb misr al-ahrār), the Egyptian Social Democratic Party (ḥizb al-miṣrī al-dīmūqrāṭī al-ijtimāʿī 7), the Democratic Front (ḥizb al-jabha al-dīmūqrāṭīyya), the Dustour Party (ḥizb al-dustūr), the National Association for Change (al-jamʿiyya al-wataniyya li l-taghīīr), and the Egypt Party (ḥizb misr).

The first to react to “The Innocence of Muslims,” even before the assault on the US
embassy in Cairo, was Ḥamdīn Ṣābbāḥī on his Twitter account on 10 September 2012. In a tweet, he stated: ‘The film offending our noble Messenger is a crime,’ but conceded that Islam and Muhammad are ‘greater’ than ‘those who offend them.’ Interestingly, though, Ṣābbāḥī asserted that ‘the freedom of creativity and expression are bounded to social constants and the respect of its sacred items (muqaddasat),’ and thus established a difference in the concept of freedom between Egypt and the place where this video was produced, the ‘West.’

In contrast, the deputy secretary general of the hizb miṣr al-qawmī, Rafāʿīl Bulūs, was the first of those in this section to mention the background of this video. Rafāʿīl Bulūs reportedly rejected ‘the support of some Copts in the diaspora and the extremist priest Terry Jones for the production of the film.’

Given the ‘Egyptian Church’s condemnation of it, Bulūs pleaded against the generalisation of all Copts. All in all, he condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” as a ‘foolish act’ but mainly focused on the negative impact it may have on Egypt; national unity is therefore a ‘red line that must not be exceeded.’ In addition, when asked his opinion by al-Yawm al-Sābi’ on 8 September 2012, the secretary general of hizb miṣr al-qawmī, ʿIffat al-Sādāt, also referred to the background of this video when he ‘condemned what the Copts in the diaspora (aqbāt al-mahgar) caused to circulate.’ However, this reaction will be further analysed in Section 2.5.1 on the media coverage in Egypt, as it can be suggested that this reaction was formulated at the request of al-Yawm al-Sābi’. Interestingly, however, ʿIffat al-Sādāt called on both al-Azhar and the ‘Egyptian Church’ to counter this video as the two counterparts in the Egyptian nation. To some extent this displays a nationalization of the Church and Al-Azhar.

Much more concise are the two official reactions by the Free Egyptian Party. Al-Ahrām wrote on 12 September: ‘the Free Egyptians Party condemned the film’ and quoted its spokesman as saying that this kind of film represented ‘creative degeneration.’ Furthermore, the Free

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315 Ḥamdīn Ṣābbāḥī, a former candidate for the presidential elections in June 2012, defined himself as ‘Nasserist, progresist, left wing, nationalist, Muslim, and patriotic.’ He founded several clubs in the 1970s which promoted the ideas of Gamāl Ḥāfīz al-Nāṣir and got into conflict with president Anwar al-Sādāt on the issue of economic liberalization. In Al-Ahram Hebdo. 18-24 July 2012. Garder le positif, oublier le négatif. Number 931. Year 18. Page 5.


Egyptian Party in the governorate of Kafr al-Shaykh published a statement in which it condemned ‘any offense against the religions, the sacred things (muqaddasāt) or religious symbols.’ As in the case of hizb misr al-qawmi, we will analyse another reaction by the Free Egyptian Party later on in the context of media coverage in Egypt; that is the reaction by Bāsīl ‘Ādil on 8 September 2012, on al-Yawm al-Sabī’, in which he was presented as former MP. The reaction from the Egyptian Social Democratic Party was similarly cautious and short, given in al-Ahrām on 12 September, it described the video as ‘provoking religious feelings and stirring up strife.’ Its deputy secretary general, Farīd Zahrān, called for ‘mutual respect between all creeds and religions.’

In contrast, the Democratic Front’s reaction reflected a greater concern, as it appealed to Egyptians not to give in to ‘those who want to inflame strife between Muslims and Copts,’ defining the makers of this video as a ‘group [which] sold its conscience to the devil and call themselves “aqbāt al-mahjar” [but] they are known for their enmity to every Egyptian.’

Both the Dustour Party (hizb al-dustūr) and the National Association for Change (al-jamʿ iyya al-wataniyya li l-taghīr) were founded on the initiative of the former secretary general of the IAEA, Muḥammad al-Barādāʾī. In 2010 he founded the National Association for Change in cooperation with other political actors to put political pressure on Ḥusnī Mubārak. In addition, together with George Ḥūṣnī Mubārak, Muḥammad al-Barādāʾī founded the Dustour Party in September 2012. By then, George Ḥūṣnī Mubārak was already a famous politician and activist as he had co-founded the kifāya/Kefaya protest movement in 2005, which called for the non-extension of Ḥusnī Mubārak’s presidency and rejected the take-over by his son, Gamāl (Tadros 2012, 27).

Now coming to the Dustour party, Muḥammad al-Barādāʾī, was the only secular politician who condemned the violence in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims” and the murder of the US ambassador, stating: ‘This has no connection to Islam, but rather it offences ourselves and

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321 Al-Ahram. 14 September 2012.  
322 Al-Yawm al-Sabī. 8 September 2012.  
323 The Egyptian Social Democratic Party promotes a more socially oriented policy. It was founded in March 2011 and included amongst its most prominent members Farīd Zahrān, who was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In al-Ahram English, 18 November 2011. Egyptian Social Democratic Party. Doi: http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/33/104/26700/Elections-/Political-Parties/Egyptian-Social-Democratic-Party.aspx (retrieved May 23, 2016).  
324 Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012.  
325 Al-Ahram. 13 September 2012.  
326 Masress. 25 February 2010.  
our creeds.\(^{328}\) Furthermore, al-Barādāʿī expressed his strong condemnation of ‘any offense against the noble Messenger (PBUH) and this (is) in the context of the film.’ “The Innocence of Muslims” was also one of the issues discussed by George Īṣḥāq at the founding conference of the Dustour Party in Kafr al-Shaykh on 13 September.\(^{329}\) In the name of the party, he demanded the United States punish the producers of the video and stop its spread. Implicitly referring to the potential threat this video represented for Egypt, he stated ‘Egypt is undamaged in its strong Coptic and Muslim woven fabric.’\(^{330}\) In contrast, the statement by the National Association for Change, which was published on 12 September 2012, went into more detail on the discourse of national unity. First of all, “The Innocence of Muslims” was described as ‘the production of this film charged with racism, contempt of religions and the insult of sacred items (muqaddasāt).’\(^{331}\) Moreover, the association regarded the video’s purpose as ‘stirring up strife between Egyptian Muslims and Christians [and] crushing the unity of the Egyptian national woven fabric (nasīj).’ As a result, the organization praised the ‘position of the Egyptian churches and Egyptian Christians (masīḥīyyūn) in Egypt and outside of Egypt who condemned the film and its producers and insisted on their high esteem for Islam and the noble prophet.’ This sentence suggests an expectation towards Christians to show solidarity. This is emphasized by the expression of concern for the decision of Dutch government to give political asylum to Copts, ‘Copts are attached to them remaining in the country forever.’

Finally, there is the reaction from the Egypt Party,\(^{332}\) whose secretary general, ‘Amrū Muhammad Ḥilmī Khālid, defined “The Innocence of Muslims” as an ‘offense to every Muslim and to humanity as a whole.’ He particularly criticized Europe for not being able to implement a ‘balance between freedom of expression and the respect of sacred things (muqaddasāt),’\(^{333}\) even though this video was actually produced in the United States and had no connection with Europe.

Apart from the reactions from ‘Amrū Mūsā, Ḥamdīn Ṣabbāḥī, and the National Association for Change, all the reactions were rather short and limited to a condemnation of the video. Muhammad al-Barādāʿī is the only one who condemned the violence in reaction to the
video. Few reactions discussed the background of the video and instead employed the discourse of national unity.

2.3.4.2 Organizations

This section will analyse the reactions of a few human rights organizations and of the Union of Arab Writers. These human rights organizations are the Egyptian Union for Human Rights (munāzamat al-ittiḥād al-miṣrī li ḥuqūq al-insān), the National Council of Human Rights (al-majlis al-qawmī li-ḥuqūq al-insān), the Sawasya Center for Human Rights and Against Discrimination (markaz sawāsiyya li-ḥuqūq al-insān wa munāḥada al-tamīīz), and the Arabic Network for Human Rights (al-shabka al-‘arabiyya li-ḥuqūq al-insān).

Firstly, with regards to the Egyptian Union of Human Rights, the media mentioned three reactions. On 12 September 2012 al-Ahrām quoted the organization’s president Nagīb Gabriel ‘saying’ that ‘the offense against religions or its religious symbols contradicts the teachings of the revealed religions,’ and stating that the support of ‘a number of Copts in the diaspora’ for this video showed there was a ‘big conspiracy to divide Egypt.’

Two days later, the organization repeated its condemnation but also rejected the violence which occurred during the assault on the US embassy. Finally, a few days later, Nagīb Gabriel announced the establishment of a group of Coptic and Muslim lawyers to deal with the ‘phenomenon of attack on religions and their symbols.

Similarly, the director of the Arab Network of Human Rights, Gamāl ‘Ayd, tried to dissociate Christians in Egypt from this video, stating that the latter must not be made responsible for the doings of Mūrīs Ṣādiq, whom he described as the ‘author of the offending film,’ an ‘extremist and preacher of hatred,’ who ‘offends Christians before [he] offends Muslims.’ All in all, Gamāl ‘Ayd regarded the video as a ‘sermon of hate against the two elements of the united nation, whether Muslim or Christian.’

In comparison, the reaction by the National Council of Human Rights338 was much shorter; it condemned the ‘showing of the film offending the noble Messenger’ and viewed it as a ‘clear...

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334 Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012. غضب شعبي من الإساءة للرسول. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.
assault on human rights and one form of contempt of religions.’

In contrast, the Sawasiya Center\textsuperscript{340} silenced the involvement of any Copt, and firstly condemned the film as an ‘attempt to create a battle (\textit{waqīʿa}) between the two elements of the united nation,’ and, secondly, condemned the issue of the German magazine \textit{Titanic} as an ‘attack by Western media to wilfully offend the most sacred religious symbol.’\textsuperscript{341} In particular, it views its purpose at igniting Muslim hatred towards Christians in Western societies (ibid).

On 14 September 2012, the Union of Arab Writers published a statement in the name of ‘literates and writers of the Arab nation (\textit{waṭan}) dealing with the production of a film ‘offending the Messenger Muhammad (PBUH) and spread on YouTube.’ As to its background, the union stated that it was produced by ‘some Copts in the diaspora who cooperated with the American extremist “Terry Jones.”’\textsuperscript{342} On the one hand it established freedom of creed as one of the most important freedoms. But the union warned in particular against the potential threats caused by the film; ‘stir up strife between Muslims and Christians’, it “threatens world peace which is very much needed now.”

2.3.4.3 The April 6 Movement and the Loyalty of Egypt’s Copts

This movement emerged in April 2008 in connection with the protests by the textile workers in Mahalla, in the Delta.\textsuperscript{343} According to \textit{Al-Ahram Hebdo}, this organization was mainly composed of young people.

The reactions of the April 6 Movement (\textit{ḥarakat 6 abrīl}) are analysed separately because the organization seemed to speak in the name of Christians and to display a serious concern regarding potential backlashes on Christians. In connection to “The Innocence of Muslims,” there are one statement, two reactions from members, and a protest organized in Banī Swīf. On 12 September 2012, \textit{al-Ahrām} mentioned a brief statement issued by the April 6 Movement condemning the film whose purpose is said to be to ‘stir discord (\textit{fītna}) between the sons of the united nation.’ The statement emphasised that the video contradicted ‘the teachings of the tolerant religions.’\textsuperscript{344} In addition, the newspaper quoted Angie Ḥamdī stating that the makers of this video ‘do not represent all Copts in the diaspora.’ Furthermore, \textit{Waṭanī} reported that the April 6 Movement of Banī Swīf organized a protest in this city and used banners such as ‘Only

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\textsuperscript{340} The Sawasiya Center was originally set up by the Muslim Brotherhood.

\textsuperscript{341} Al-Ahram. 25 September 2012. حملة ممنهضة ضد الإسلام. و "سواسية": حملة ممنهضة ضد الإسلام... Number 45949. Year 137. Page 5.


\textsuperscript{344} Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012. غضب شعبي من الإساءة للرسول. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.
the Messenger of God’ and ‘Beware of strife (fitna)’. Interestingly, according to the local coordinator of the movement, Īhāb Khāṭir, this protest aimed to ‘emphasize the patriotism of the Christian brothers in Egypt, their loyalty and love for the nation (waṭan).’ In addition, he demanded the makers be stripped of their citizenship and that relations with the ‘countries involved in this film for a certain amount of time’ be temporarily suspended.

### 2.4 Protests and Joint Christian-Muslim Reactions

This section comprised another range of possible reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims”; protests, conferences, and visits, both purely “Muslim” and “Christian-Muslim.” The section most clearly sheds light on the potential threat this video represented for Christians in Egypt, as was epitomized in the assault on the US embassy. It also raises, again, the question of it was who had the political lead in this whole issue? We will first look at the storming of the US embassy (2.4.1) and the issue of Coptic participation (2.4.1.1), then we will analyse the protests (2.4.2), the conferences (2.4.3), and visits by Christian actors to Islamic leaders (2.4.4). Finally, the section will analyse the statement of the bayt al-ʿāʾila as another means of joint Christian-Muslim reaction (2.4.5).

#### 2.4.1 The Storming of the US Embassy

The attempted storming of the US embassy in Cairo was one of the most spectacular moments of the controversy surrounding “The Innocence of Muslims” and symbolized the “Muslim anger.” All in all, the protest at the US embassy on the evening of 11 September 2012 shed light on a deeper dilemma: the claim to defend Islam and to be a nation encompassing all its “elements,” i.e. the question of the involvement of the Copts.

Following the thwarted assault, The Guardian asserted that the protest was ‘largely dominated by ultraconservative Islamists.’ A closer look, however, revealed a more diverse composition. Salafi movements indeed announced their organization of or participation in protests on 11 September 2012 at the US embassy. Wisām ʿAbd al-Warāth, the former president of the TV channel al-ḥikma and a famous TV Islamist preacher, reported that the Nur Party and

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345 Watani. 14 September 2012. Doi: http://www.wataninet.com/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7%D8%AA6-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%A4%D9%83%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%8A/142641/ (retrieved May 23, 2016).


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al-da’wa al-salafiyya announced their joining of the Coalition of the Voice of Wisdom (i’tilāf ṣawt al-ḥikma) in its protest. This Coalition was set up by Wisām ‘Abd al-Warāth in the wake of the “The Innocence of Muslims”347. On 11 September, however, organizations such as “the Revolutionary Front for the Protection of the Revolution” (al-jabha al-thawriyya li-himāyat al-thawra), the “General Coalition for the Revolution of 25 January” (al-i’tilāf al-‘āmm li-thawrat 25 yanāyir), the “Rally for the Arab Spring” (tagammu’ al-rabī’ al-‘arabī) and some Coptic organizations also participated in the protest.348 In addition to these political movements, the soccer clubs Zamalek and Ahli joined the protest,349 and the former are said to have worn t-shirts with ‘By my father and my mother, oh Messenger of God’ written on them.350 The soccer clubs’ prestige improved during the Revolution of 25 January 2011, as they fiercely opposed the regime of Ḥusnī Mubārak, especially during the so-called battle of the camel.351 In the aftermath of the revolution, however, their reputation was tarnished by reports of violence, such as acts of sabotage against infrastructure, and especially by the violent clash in Port Said at a match between the Ahli and Masri soccer clubs which caused the death of more than seventy people.

All in all, Watānī reported that less than 3,000 people participated, amongst them some “Christians” and members of the revolutionary youth.352 Similarly, al-Shurūq counted ‘several thousand’ protesters from different Islamist streams (al-Shuruq 12 September 2012). Yet, Cornelis Hulsman, the director of the Arab West Foundation, noticed that this number was small compared to the turnouts at the revolution.353

Both the banners carried during the protests and the slogans chanted revealed a mainly

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348 Copts Today. 11 September 2012. أول مرة لقباقب وقفائين في مظاهرة واحدة أمام السفارة الأمريكية احتجاجا على الفيلم المسيء للرسول. Doi: http://www.coptstoday.com/Copts-News/Detail.php?id=32345 (retrieved March 3, 2014). The debate among Coptic organizations over whether they should participate in this protest at the US embassy will be discussed, further below in Section 2.4.1.2.
349 Al-Shuruq. 12 September 2012. السفارة الأمريكية تحت الحصار. Number 1320. Year 4. Page 1. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Shuruq 12 September 2012.”
352 Watani. 11 September 2012. تظاهرات أمام السفارة الأمريكية لإدانة الفيلم المسيء للرسول. Doi: http://www.watani.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%A9%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86/142794/ (retrieved May 23, 2016). This source is quoted in this section as “Watani 11 September 2012.”
Islamist outlook. With regards to the banners, al-Shurūq mentioned the ‘black banner’ (al-Shuruq 12 September 2012), that is, the banner sometimes referred to as the “Al-Qaida banner.” Similarly, the slogans showed an evident Islamist influence, even a jihadi influence, as al-Shurūq reported on the slogan ‘We are all Osama bin Laden’ (al-Shuruq 12 September 2012). This slogan was also reported by Watani, which added ‘We are all Abu Yahya al-Libī’ (Watani 11 September 2012).354 Similarly, the slogans also revealed a strong opposition to the United States: ‘Oh damned America, we don’t want your aid,’355 and ‘We will crush America.’356 In contrast, some slogans displayed a more neutral defence of Islam, in particular of Muhammad, such as the creed, ‘By my spirit and my blood, I am at your service, Messenger of God’ (Watani 11 September 2012), ‘At your service, Messenger of God’ and ‘My soul is at your service, oh Messenger of God’ (al-Safir 12 September 2012). In addition, a number of slogans also targeted the producers of “The Innocence of Muslims,” such as Mūrīs Ṣādiq; ‘Oh Mūrīs Ṣādiq, you coward and agent of America’357 and ‘You are a useless dog’ (al-Safir 12 September 2012).358 Moreover, al-Safīr reported that on some banners, the producers of the video were depicted as pigs. As a result, this means that for the protesters at the US embassy it was clear who was involved in the production of this video; they did mistake Mūrīs Ṣādiq for the producer of the video but rightly did not mention “Sam Bacile” or at least a “Jewish/Zionist/Israeli involvement,” as the Western media later suggested for a brief time. In addition, some banners emphasized Christian-Muslim coexistence in colloquial Arabic; such as ‘Muslims and Christians say “no” to Americans and to offending Islam” (Watani 11 September 2012)359 and “Muslim and Christian are strongly united.”360 Interestingly, it may be suggested that those banners dealing with the Egyptian context – whether criticizing Mūrīs Ṣādiq or underlining the Christian-Muslim unity – were written in colloquial Arabic, whereas the banners or slogans referring to Islam in a broad sense – be it to the prophet or even to Salafi-Jihadi support – were conveyed in Modern Standard Arabic. So far, the slogans and protests suggest a certain tension between a broad Egyptian protest and a specific Islamist, even radical and violent Islamist protest.

354 Abu Yahya al-Liby was the Al-Qaida number 2 and was killed by American drones in Pakistan in June 2012
355 “يا أمريكا يا ملعونة مش عايزين المعونة”
356 “يا أمريكا يا ملعونة مش عايزين المعونة”
357 “يا موريس يا جبان يا عميل الأمريكان”
358 “انتو كلاب و لا ليكم لزمة”
359 “مسلمون و مسيحيين يقولون لا للأمريكان ولا لساسة الإسلام”
360 “مسلم مسيحي يد واحدة”

The analysis will now focus on the course of the protest which resulted in worldwide headlines concerning a violent assault on the US embassy. Again, the British Guardian underlined the violence in connection to this protest and reported that “Islamists” in particular climbed the walls of the embassy and replaced the US flag with the so-called Islamist flag:

Egyptian protesters, largely ultraconservative Islamists, climbed the walls of the US embassy in Cairo on Tuesday, made their way into the courtyard and brought down the flag, replacing it with a black flag with an Islamic inscription to protest a film attacking Islam’s prophet, Muhammad (Guardian 11 September 2012).

In contrast, some media and witnesses reported a more balanced view. For instance, Jayson Casper, a researcher at the Arab West Foundation, witnessed the protest on 11 September 2012 and reported that it was in fact soccer hooligans who attempted to climb the walls of the embassy and that the police seemed to rely on the Salafi protesters to de-escalate the situation (Casper 2012b). Similarly, the Lebanese newspaper al-Safîr reported that the police negotiated with the protesters who eventually descended from the US embassy (al-Safir 12 September 2012). However, when recalling these events in January 2015, Jayson Casper expressed his impression that the protest seemed to be to some extent manufactured and actually lacked anger, which was mainly directed at “Copts in the diaspora” (Casper 17 January 2015).

The following day, on 12 September 2012, some leading organizers of the protest, Wisām ‘Abd al-Warāth, Madmūh Ismā‘īl al-Muḥāmānī, and Ayman Amīr published a statement in which they apologized for the violence of the protest, especially the attempted assault on the US embassy. However, they pledged to repeat this protest by a milyūniyya (a large popular gathering) on Thursday 13 September 2012 if their demands were not met; i.e. an apology by the US Administration and the end to the showing of the ‘film.’ Interestingly, strong expectations and demands were again, as in similar reactions, directed at the Egyptian presidency itself, demanding that Muḥammad Mursī take a stance that ‘preserves the identity and the status of Egypt.’ Equally, the statement expressed its concerns for at the ‘silence’ of the presidency. Yet, the statement also showed the making of an effort to define itself and the protest as a broad and genuine Egyptian protest against ‘this war on Islam [which] has drawn the whole Egyptian people onto the street’ against the ‘plan of the Copts in the diaspora and US secret services.’ Furthermore, the signatories thanked ‘the Copts who participated and reject the offense,’ without specifying who these “Copts” were. Thus, this statement differentiated between “good” and “bad” Copts, i.e. between those who expressed their solidarity with

Muslims and live in Egypt and those, outside of Egypt, who allegedly supported the production of this video. This statement also showed the need for Copts to support this protest, and especially for Copts to be visible in this protest via banners, for instance, because their presence backed the legitimacy of this protest. The images of this protest and the assault on the US embassy increased the fears of backlashes against Copts.

The heavy clashes in the area of the US embassy in Cairo on subsequent days showed how much the presidential authority was questioned. 224 demonstrators and 24 policemen were injured; 24 people were imprisoned during these clashes. The clashes continued on Friday, 14 September and through the night of 15 September to 16 September. On 16 September, the security forces reportedly regained control over Tahrir Square.

2.4.1.2 The Issue of Coptic Participation in the Protest on 11 September

As several organizations announced their participation in a protest at the US embassy in Cairo in the evening of 11 September 2012, a discussion broke out amongst Coptic organizations over whether they should participate in it or not. Activist Ibrahim Louis, the Christian Brothers, and Hānī al-Gazirī announced that they would not participate, while the Maspero Youth Union and the Coalition of Egypt’s Copts reportedly did participate. The latter’s secretary general, Fādī Yūsif, justified the participation through the need to counter the video with a ‘true national unity between the sons of the Egyptian people, Muslims and Christians,’ otherwise it would divide the two religions (ibid). In contrast, the organizations who did not participate put forward the question of them not being prepared (Hānī al-Gazirī) and the loose organization of this protest (Christian Brothers) (ibid). The Christian Brothers referred to the churches’ and the movement’s condemnation and therefore did not see a need for Copts ‘to go out and protest on the streets to dissociate’ themselves from something they were accordingly not responsible for (ibid).

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365 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 11 September 2012. الحركات القبطية تنقسم بشأن المشاركة في تظاهرات الفيلم المسيء للرسول.. “الإخوان المسلمين”: لسنا مطالبين بالتظاهر لتبرئة ساحتنا.. و“أقباط مصر وماسبيرو”: نرفض شق الصف ونطالب بمحاكمة دولية للمسيئين. Doi. http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/11/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%A9_%D8%A9%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B3%D9%85_%D8%A8_%D8%B4%D8%A3%D9%86_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9_%D9%81%D9%89_%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%85_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%89%D8%A1/782863#.Vjx7ZV5oFvJ (retrieved May 23, 2016).
2.4.2 The Protests of Friday 14 September and Friday 21 September

This section will focus on protests against “The Innocence of Muslims” on Friday 14 and Friday 21, 2011. Firstly, we will look at the mainly “Muslim” protests and secondly at joint “Christian-Muslim” protests. In both cases, one key question concerns the political lead in these protests.

With regards to the Muslim protests on Friday 14 and Friday 21, 2011 (where Christian participation was not mentioned), the overall question concerns the political lead, if any. In this regard, the violent clashes in the area of the US embassy in Cairo significantly impacted the reaction of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood. On 13 September, the organization called for a peaceful protest in all of Egypt for Friday 14, 2011, after the Friday prayer. However, because of the violent clashes, the Muslim Brotherhood decided that its participation in Tahrir Square would be merely symbolic. In other governorates, the movement or its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, did lead some protests or participated in them such as in Luxor, in al-Qaliyubiyya Governorate, and in Maṭrūḥ. In some other cases, the Muslim Brotherhood marched in cooperation with other political forces; in Suez reportedly with ‘Salafi movements’ and ‘liberals,’ in Damiette (Dumyat) and al-Fayyum with al-da’wa al-salafiyya and other political forces (al-Ahram 15 September 2012).

In contrast, in Alexandria, al-gamā‘a al-islāmiyya and its political arm, the Building and Development Party, seemed to have the lead, as on 14 September al-Ahrām announced that they would organize a conference in Alexandria (al-Ahram 14 September 2012). On Friday 14, thousands reportedly participated in a protest where a tribune was erected for the Muslim Brotherhood, the Freedom and Justice Party, al-gamā‘a al-islāmiyya, and its political arm, the Building and Development Party. Leading members of al-gamā‘a al-islāmiyya reportedly delivered a speech or participated, including Ṭāriq al-Zumur, ‘Īṣām ‘Abd al-Mājiḏ, Maḥmūd Muḥḥib Allah, and Ṣafwat ‘Abd al-Ghaṇī (ibid). Similarly, al-gamā‘a al-islāmiyya participated in protests in Southern Sinai on 14 September (al-Ahram 15 September 2012) and 21

368 Al-Ahram. 14 September 2012. استمرار ردود الفعل الغاضبة على الفيلم المسيء: الأزهر يطالب باللتزام بضوابط الاحتجاج والبعد عن العنف. Number 45938. Year 137. Page 6. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Ahram 14 September 2012.”
369 Al-Ahram. 15 September 2012. ومسيرات عارمة لنصرة الرسول في المحافظات. Number 45939. Year 137. Page 4. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Ahram 15 September 2012.”
In addition, protests took place in other areas with no leading political force mentioned; as in Alexandria, where Ultras participated and an American flag was burnt, in al-Baḥrayn, in Northern Sinai, in the Red Sea Governorate (al-Ahram 15 September 2012) and on Friday 21 in Cairo and in Alexandria (al-Ahram 22 September 2012). In a very few instances, secular parties participated, like in Dumiyyāt, where members of the Wafd Party formed a human chain. All in all, according to the media, the participation ranged from a few hundred in the Red Sea Governorate, in Suez, in Southern Sinai on Friday 14 (al-Ahram 15 September 2012) and Friday 21 (al-Ahram 22 September 2012) to thousands in Dumiyyāt (al-Ahram 15 September 2012). This number is small.

This overview shows the absence of a leading political force in Muslim protests, as the Muslim Brotherhood seemed to retreat and al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya seemed to take the lead.

In addition to these protests, a number of joint Christian-Muslim protests also took place in reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims.” Therefore, we will first look at the protests that took place in Cairo and its surrounding area and then at those that took place in the governorates.

The first noteworthy event was the reported establishment of a mobile hospital in the Evangelical church of Qaṣr al-Dawbāra near Tahrir Square to help the injured. Besides this, the protests in Cairo seemed to have been organized by both lay Christians as well as high and lower-ranking Christian clerics. For instance, on 12 September 2012, Copts Today reported that a certain Imīl Wagīyya announced the organization of a protest starting at St Mark’s Cathedral in al-ʿAbāssiya neighbourhood (Cairo). Through this protest, Imīl Wagīyya expressed his will to emphasize the statement of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the fact that ‘Copts in the diaspora (aqbāṭ al-mahjar)’ harmed Copts in Egypt with their behavior. Thus, he concluded: ‘It is necessary to hold fast to the Christian principles of love, tolerance, and coexistence with the Muslim Brothers and not to hurt their feelings.’ In contrast, the protest that started at the mosque Muṣṭafā Muḥmūd in al-Muhāndīsīn on Friday 14 September 2012 was joined by nearly...
one hundred Coptic demonstrators who were sent by the Bishop of Gizeh, Theodosius. At this protest, banners were raised: ‘Muslims and Christians are strongly united,’ and ‘We reject the offense against the Messenger.’ As Imīl Wagiyya mentioned above, al-Shuruq referred to the priest Blīāns’s criticism of “Copts in the diaspora,” albeit implicitly, stating that those who produced this film did not read the Gospel and did not know the ‘true Christian creed.’ In addition, Bishop Theodosius sent three delegations to the same or another protest organized by the Muslim Brotherhood; Salafi youths and members of al-gamā’a al-islāmiyya also participated in this protest. In connection to this protest, the priest Slwāns Dhikrī told al-Maṣrī al-Yawm of his condemnation of ‘some Copts in the diaspora’ whose actions contradicted ‘true Christianity.’ In addition, he underlined that ‘Christians belong with all their rights to this country.’ In this protest the banners emphasized again national unity; ‘Muslims and Christians are one hand,’ and ‘What happened supported Coptic-Muslim relations and not the other way round.’ So far, the protests in Cairo more clearly and openly criticized the background of the video as the action of a few ‘Copts in the diaspora.’ These few examples seem to reflect a stronger urgency to dissociate Christians in Egypt from those outside. This sense can be supported by the condemnation by the priest of the church Mār Mīnā in Imbābā, Father Abānūb Gād Karīm, of ‘any behavior, book, film that offends the Islamic religion.’ Furthermore, he expressed his solidarity with Muslims but also insisted on the need for the protests to be peaceful. However, this condemnation may have also been motivated by the fact that the church Mār Mīnā in Imbābā was one of the churches that were attacked following the Arab Spring. Ironically, this assault at the hands of the Salafists took place without an attempt by the police to stop it.

In the governorates, joint Christian-Muslim protests took place in Port Said, in Bānī Swīf, in Suez, in Minyā, in Asyūt, and in Wādī al-Gadīd. In Port Said, the secretary of Bishop Tādrus called on Copts to participate in the protests on Friday 14 September 2012. Subsequently, the church of Port Said sent a high-ranking delegation of monks and clerics to a

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378 مسلم ومنسيحي إيد واحدة.
380 "سلطان دكري.
381 مسلم ومنسيحي إيد واحدة.
384 See Introduction.
protest organized by the Muslim Brotherhood.\footnote{Al-Nahar Egypt. 14 September 2012. بالصور: بورسعيد تندكر إساءة الإسلام ومسيرات بمشاركة الكنيسة. 2012. http://www.alnaharegypt.com/t~86089 (retrieved May 23, 2016).} In Banī Swīf, two different protests took place. On 16 September 2012, \textit{Watānī} reported that five priests and a number of Copts participated in a protest.\footnote{Watani. 16 September 2012. مشاركة قبطية واسعة في مظاهرات رفض الفيلم المسيء بالمحافظة. Number 2647. Year 54/Number 613. Year 12. Page 1.} In this same edition, \textit{Watānī} also reported that the April 6 Movement of Banī Swīf would stage a protest to emphasize the ‘loyalty and connection of Copts to Egypt.’\footnote{Watani. 16 September 2012. لأبيه برني سويف توكد على وطنية المسيحيين وخلاصهم وحميه.} Similarly, in Suez, the Maspero Youth Union staged a protest, but underlined national unity; ‘the national Egyptian woven fabric is Muslim and Christian,’ ‘I am an Egyptian against strife.’ In the case of Minyā, \textit{al-Shuruq al-Jadīd} merely reported on the call by ‘Coptic activists’ and the diocese to participate in a protest on Friday 14.\footnote{Al-Masry al-Youm. 15 September 2012. تواصل الإحتجاجات ضد الفيلم المسيء بآهاء مصري.} At this protest, the “Coalition of the Youth of January 25” (\textit{i’tilāf shabāb 25 yanāyir}), the “Free Egyptian Youth” (\textit{al-shabāb al-misrī al-hurr}), the “We are all Free” movement (\textit{harakat kullunā ahrār}), as well as political parties like the Freedom and Justice Party, the Wafād Party, the Nur Party, the Salaфī \textit{ḥizb al-ašāla} (Party of Authenticity), and the Building and Development Party reportedly participated.\footnote{Arab West Report. 17 September 2012. أسقف مزار يعتذر للمسلمين عن الإساءة مؤكدا مخالفتها لسماحة المسيحية.} Perhaps in this connection, \textit{al-Maṣrī al-Yawm} reported that roughly 500 people and 100 Copts (as if Copts were not people) marched from the diocese see on to the mosque with banners ‘No to the offense of Muslim brothers.’\footnote{Al-Masry al-Youm. 15 September 2012.} Similarly, in Asyūṭ there were reports of two joint Christian-Muslim actions. In the first case, \textit{al-Maṣrī al-Yawm} reported that on Saturday, 15 September 2012, thousands of Muslims and Copts participated in a conference in the city of al-Qawsīyya in the Asyūṭ Governorate.\footnote{Al-Masry al-Youm. 15 September 2012. تواصل الإحتجاجات ضد الفيلم المسيء بآهاء مصر.} A Coptic lawyer told the newspaper that he would lodge a complaint against Mūrīs Ṣādiq (ibid). Lastly, hundreds are said to have protested in Wādī al-Gadīd and the local Muslim Brotherhood, the Free Egyptian Party, and the church of Virgin issued a statement (ibid).

**Summary of Section 2.4.2**

These protests were mostly the result of what the media were willing to report. Overall, they showed that joint Christian-Muslim protests were more strongly dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood than merely “Muslim” protests. Some dioceses that did not react officially sent
delegations to these protests; the dioceses of Gizeh and al-Minyā. The reactions, the banners and slogans referred more strongly to the discourse of national unity and to dissociation by denouncing the diaspora.

2.4.3 Conferences

Another means of joint Christian-Muslim reactions were conferences. This section will first focus on the conferences that have already been mentioned, then on other joint conferences, and finally on conferences with only “Muslim” participants.

In Chapter 2.1.1, we already mentioned six Coptic Orthodox Bishops who expressed their reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” in conferences. These bishops were: Bishop Mārtīrūs (general bishop and delegate of the Coptic Orthodox Church), Bishop Kīrillus (Najʿ Ḥammaḏī), Bishop Būlā (Ṭanṭa), Bishop Murquṣ (Shubrā al-Khayma, a northern suburb of Cairo) and Bishop Bisantī (Hilwān wa l-Maṣara). On 13 September 2012, Bishop Mārtīrūs participated in a conference entitled “No to Stirring Strife … Yes to Supporting the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)” which was organized by the professional Association of Lawyers.393 Besides him, several other personalities also participated, including the Coptic intellectual Gamāl Asʿad394 as well as a delegate of the Faculty of Law of the University of Banī Swīf, Muḥammad Ḥāzhr, and a member of the Association of Lawyers, Ībrāhīm Īlyās. Under the leadership of Bishop Kīrillus, the diocese of Najʿ Ḥammaḏī organized its eleventh festival.395 Besides the bishop, a member of the Christian-Muslim bayt al-ʿāʾila in Najʿ Ḥammaḏī, shaykh Ḥabīb ʿAbd al-Ghifār ʿAbd al-ʿĀl, gave a speech in which he ascribed the background of “The Innocence of Muslims” to the “Zionists,” since the video displayed ‘Zionist goals’ and reflected the alleged plan of the “Zionists” in The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: ‘We are the lords of the world and we [will] destroy it.’ In so speaking, the representative of the bayt al-ʿāʾila made a concerted effort to divert the anger of the Muslims from the Copts to an outside enemy, the “Zionists.” As already mentioned, Bishop Būlā made a similar effort to divert attention in the speech he gave at the conference he organized in Ṭanṭa. The governor of the Gharbiyya Governorate, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir, participated in this conference as did members of the Freedom and Justice Party and several other political actors.396 In this context, the governor of the governorate made a speech, in which he considered the makers of the video...

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393 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 13 September 2012. مطالب بشطب موريس صادق من نقابة المحامين.. مؤتمر "لا لإثارة الفتنة" يطرح وثيقة..
394 See Chapter 2, 4. Protests and Joint Christian-Muslim Reactions; and 2.3.2. Coptic Organizations
396 Gate al-Ahram. 15 September 2012. الأنبا بولا: الفيلم المسيء فكرة شيطانية صهيونية لضرب الأديان.. وتحذير عملي للمؤسسات...
‘evils of the people and the heretics of the time,’ and an attack on human rights and international agreement. Surprisingly, he went on to assert that the ‘freedom of a person is bound to the general conditions of ethics and rights.’ Similarly, members of the Freedom and Justice Party participated in the same conference as Bishop Murqus, Shubrā al-Khayma, on 15 September 2012 in Cairo. In addition to representatives of the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, priests from a Catholic Church also participated. This conference was organized by the Public Coptic Association (hay‘at al-aqbāṭ al-‘āmm) and the newspaper al-Muhāshīr on Saturday 15. The president of the Public Coptic Association, Sharīf Dūs, indicated that “The Innocence of Muslims” was produced six months ago and shown only once.

Sharīf Dūs insisted on stripping the producers of their nationality because people should not rely on Western justice in a place where, as he saw it, freedom of speech allowed offense and religion had become a private matter after World War Two. In addition, the Coptic intellectual and then advisor to President Muḥammad Mursī, Samīr Murqus, also gave a speech, but he did not mention the video and instead spoke of the crisis of the Coptic middle class. Lastly, the sixth bishop to participate in a joint Christian-Muslim conference was Bishop Bisantī of Hilwān wa l-Maṣ‘ara and was at the conference “Together for the Support of the Messenger.”

Aside from Bishop Bisantī, high-ranking actors such as the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muḥammad Bādī; the Islamic intellectual and Muslim Brother, Muḥammad ‘Imārā; the vice-minister of Islamic endowments, Muḥammad ’Abd al-Qādir, and the priest Father Tādrus Ḥabīb participated in this conference. According to Father Tādrus Ḥabīb, the video aimed to ignite civil war in Egypt and hinder its democratization.

Three other conferences that have not been mentioned so far are the meeting between al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church on 24 September 2012; the conference organized under the leadership of the Building and Development party on 18 September “Muslims and Copts … Together Against Offending the Prophet of Islam, Muḥammad (PBUH)”; and the conference “Only the Messenger of God” on 19 September in Zamalek, in Cairo.

On 24 September, representatives of Al-Azhar and a delegation of the Coptic Orthodox Church led by Bishop Bākhūmyūs agreed on the need for the United Nations to issue a law criminalizing the offense against ‘revealed’ religions and agreed on the current state of the draft
Egyptian constitution.402

The Building and Development Party made a sustained effort to appear a moderate political force. The conference “Muslims and Copts ... Together Against the Offending the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH)” was organized in cooperation with the Forum of Moderation for Thought and Culture (muntadā al-wasaṣṭiyyā li l-fikr wa l-thaqāfi) and brought together two leading members of the party and the movement, Ṣafwat ‘Abd al-Ghanī, and ‘Abbūd al-Zumur, who was imprisoned for years and was then a member of the Shura Council of al-gamāʿa a al-islāmiyya.403 In addition, the president of the forum, Khālid al-Sharīf, and Magdī Aḥmad al-Ḥussayn, leader of ḥizb al-ʿamal al-jadīd, also participated. However, this conference succeeded in attracting only a low-ranking Christian cleric, the priest of the Episcopal church in Gizeh, Father Mīshīl Mīlād. The priest spoke of the long history of ‘true unity between the Egyptians,’ and defined “The Innocence of Muslims” as an ‘offense’ against any Muslim, which he rejected, as it represented an ‘offense for every Egyptian in the land of Egypt.’ In comparison, ‘Abbūd al-Zumur conceded the responsibility of ‘a small group of Copts in the diaspora’ for this video,404 but mainly viewed it as a ‘result of Western culture,’ which reportedly cultivates the hate of Islam,405 and aims to ‘stir up sectarian strife in Egypt.’ Again, al-gamāʿa a al-islāmiyya made a considerable effort to dissociate Christians in Egypt from this video and rejected any generalization.

A further, rather low-ranking Christian-Muslim conference was the conference “Only the Messenger of God” on 19 September in Zamalek, which was organized in cooperation with the Authority of State Affairs (hayʿat qiṣṭiyat al-dawla).406 Shaykh Shaʿbān Darwīsh,407 an Islamic preacher and member of the constituent assembly; Ashraf Muḥammad Muḥmūd, an Islamic preacher; Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz, chancellor and deputy president of the Authority of State Affairs; the Coptic activist Hānī al-Gaẓīrī; and the journalist and president of the International Organization for Development and Human Rights (al-munawṣama al-duwalīyya wa ḥuqūq al-insān), Nūr al-Dīn, participated in this conference. In this section we will only briefly mention the statements of a few actors, while the speech of Hānī al-Gaẓīrī has already been analysed in a previous section (see Section 2.3.3.2). All speeches remained silent on the Coptic

407 According to his Facebook-account, Shaʿbān Darwīsh is a member of the Council of shuyūkh of the Nur Party and is said to have first joined gamūʿ at anṣār al-summa al-muhāmadiyā where he learnt the ‘true’ Salafi creed. Facebook. (retrieved May 23, 2016).
involvement and spoke instead of ‘the offenders who hate Islam and Muslims’ (Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz), or of producers who ‘belonged neither to the Arabs nor to the Egyptian Copts’ (Nūr al-Dīn), making it necessary to punish them. However, a reference to the Copts did occur, as Shaʿbān Darwīsh quoted Pope Shinūda III ‘I am a Coptic by religion and a Muslim by civilization,’ in reference to ‘some [who] spread a negative image in foreign countries’ and to the current state of the Islamic community, which accordingly facilitated such ‘offenses.’ This assertion of the umma’s state as the core problem was interesting. Shaʿbān Darwīsh added: ‘the Arabic umma has currently erased its identity.’ Furthermore, he reminded his audience of the prophet who had to face similar offenses. All in all, the Islamic preacher mixed Arab, Coptic and Islamic identities, even ascribing an Islamic identity to Copts in Egypt, at least in “civilizational” terms, as this argument is backed by the Pope Shinūda’s quotation. Similarly, Ashraf Muḥammad Muḥmūd framed the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims” not in the context of Egypt, but instead in the context of a Western fight against the Arab “gins” and the ‘unity of the Arabs,’ who are ‘united despite the difference of creeds.’ They are allegedly the ‘sons of one people,’ united by ‘one qawmiyya’ and are targeted by the West because ‘they are the grandchildren of the noble Messenger.’ Yet, the West is said to be ‘divided and dispersed.’ Thus, even non-Muslim Christian and Jewish Arabs are to be traced back to Muhammad. Like Shaʿbān Darwīsh, Ashraf Muḥammad Muḥmūd mixed Arab, Coptic and Islamic identities and belongings.

Moreover, Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz condemned the violence in connection to this video.

Lastly, the seminar “Offending Islam and Destroying Nations” under the leadership of Prime Minister Hishām Qandīl is analysed in this section as other key Islamic actors participated in it and emphasized Christian-Muslim unity. This seminar took place on 25 September and was organized by the International Organization of African and Asian Writers. It gathered together the Prime Minister, the Minister of Islamic Endowments, Ṭalʿat ʿAfīfī; a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Guidance Bureau, ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Birr (al-Ahram 26 September 2012); as well as the president of the International Organization for Press and Media, (al-munazama al-duwaliyya li l-ṣīḥāfa wa l-ʿilām) Magdī Margān; an advisor to President Mursī, Muḥammad Fuʿād Gādallah; the advisor to shaykh al-Azhar, Muḥammad ʿAzzab; a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador al-Shādhīlī; as well as a member of the constituent assembly, Muḥammad ʿImāra. At this conference, Ṭalʿat ʿAfīfī and ‘Abd
al-Raḥman al-Birr praised the solidarity of the ‘Christian brothers’ (al-Ahram 26 September 2012) even refuting a Coptic responsibility, as ‘the Copts are people (ahl) of Egypt’ (‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Birr) (ibid). This video or ‘strife’ aimed, according to ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Birr, to ‘spread strife in Egypt by reporting that Copts in the diaspora’ were behind this video. In contrast, the minister of Islamic endowments, implicitly condemned the violence in connection to this video by asserting ‘the support of the Messenger (PBUH) is expressed by the depth of faith in the heart of the Muslims.’

**Summary of Section 2.4.3**

Joint Christian-Muslim conferences and the solely Muslim conference emphasized national unity. Some were organized by the bishops themselves. Interestingly, the Muslim Brotherhood was more strongly represented in this context than in the protests. *Al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya* and its political arm, the Building and Construction Party, also tried to further their effort to appear to be a political contender and continued with the accommodating attitude towards Christians but they were not able to attracting high-ranking clerics.

### 2.4.4 Visits

Besides protesting together and participating in joint conferences, visits by Christian actors to Islamic key actors can be regarded as another way of reacting to “The Innocence of Muslims” and of showing solidarity with Muslims. The research revealed three visits. The first visit took place on 13 September 2012, when a Coptic delegation – simply referred to by *al-Maṣrī al-Ŷawm* as made up of ‘a number of figures and leaders of the Coptic church’ – visited the headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood in al-Ismāʿīlya to express their solidarity and state that those behind this ‘film’ do not represent the ‘Copts, whether in Egypt or outside of Egypt.’

This delegation was received by the local Muslim Brotherhood representative, a representative of the Nur Party, a representative of the Building and Development Party and of *al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya*. This reaction gives the impression of being a tributary visit. In the meantime, banners which said ‘Muslims and Copts are strongly united’ were raised.

The second visit took place on approximately 17 September, when a delegation of Coptic lay figures visited *shaykh al-Azhar* Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib. This delegation was led by Samīr Mursqūṣ, and

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412 Samīr Mursqūṣ, was advisor to President Mursī and played a key role in the dialogue between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Copts before the Revolution of January 25 2011 (Guirguis 2012, 227).
was composed of George Iṣḥāq; the former president of the committee for foreign affairs of the People’s Assembly, Layla Taklā; Nabīl Murquṣ; Sāmiḥ Fawzī, and Marguerite ʿĀzīr. This delegation was quoted as having condemned the video which offends Christianity. During this meeting, the reaction of Ahmad al-Ţayyib significantly differed from other reactions, as he viewed “The Innocence of Muslims” as the proof of a ‘conspiracy against Egypt, targeting [its] unity, security and stability by playing an evil game against the national woven fabric.” In addition, he asserted that Coptic emigration was caused by the economic situation and not by persecution. Other issues were also mentioned.

The third visit took place on 4 October 2012, when a Catholic delegation visited the governor of Suez, Samīr ʿAglān. This delegation was made up of the Coptic Catholic Bishop Iṣḥāq and two Latin priests, Father Ḥanna and Father Anṭūnyūs. The delegation reportedly asserted Christians and Muslims’ unity and asked the governor for sustained contact. In comparison, the governor employed the discourse of national unity; ‘The Egyptians, Muslims and Christians, are one woven fabric and they share the same goal, which is to improve the Egyptian people and for Egypt to remain the mother of the world. No one can divide its people, Muslim and Christian.”

2.4.5 Bayt al-ʿĀila

A last means of joint Christian-Muslim reaction was the statement which was probably issued on 16 September 2011 by Maḥmūd ʿAzzab in the name of the bayt al-ʿāʾila (House of the Family). In this statement, bayt al-ʿāʾila is described as an institution representing Muslims and Christians in Egypt, that is, al-Azhar and the ‘big Egyptian Churches.’ Firstly, the statement offered its own view of “The Innocence of Muslims,” referring to it as the ‘criminal event that took place in the United States of America’ and triggered the anger of ‘the Egyptian

416 Watani. 4 October 2012. Doi: http://www.wataninejt.com/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%AD-%D9%8A%D8%BA/%D9%88%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%AD-%D9%8A%D8%BA/141208/ (retrieved May 23, 2016).
churches, the Egyptian Christians like their Muslim brothers.’ Still, the statement offered slight criticism of the violent reactions which are defined as ‘sometimes it exceeded the boundaries of reason and psychological control.’ Secondly, the statement paraphrases some key issues from the statements by al-Azhar and by the Coptic Orthodox Church. The statement by Al-Azhar was reported to have been issued by the Council of Senior Scholars under the direction of Aḥmad al-Ṭayyīb. It also quoted al-Azhar’s vague description of the video’s background, ascribing it to ‘controlling, colonial institutions,’ which are ‘Zionism.’ However, the statement repeated al-Azhar’s condemnation of the violence, recalling Muhammad’s own struggle with ‘offenses,’ quoting 25:31: ‘And thus have We made for every prophet an enemy from among the criminals. But sufficient is your Lord as a guide and a helper.’ In light of this event, al-Azhar demanded the preservation of Egypt’s unity. With regards to the statement by the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church, bayt al-ʿāʾila mentioned the argument that this video also offended Jesus Christ and ‘contradicts Christian teachings and values,’ as well as its purpose of spreading division. Bayt al-ʿāʾila agreed with both statements and supported the demand of the shaykh al-Azhar for the UN to issue a law criminalizing these offenses and the necessity of dealing with this ‘crime called “Islamophobia” in a similar way to Anti-Semitism.’

**Summary of Section 2.4**

The assault on the US embassy illustrated the failure of the state to provide security and the potentially serious consequences for Copts. The subsequent joint protests, conferences, and visits showed the intention to prevent such dire consequences. These actions also highlighted a competition amongst Islamist political forces for the political lead. In these contexts, the discourse of national unity was more strongly invoked. Overall, they showed the need for Christian participation and visibility in order to enhance and back the anger against “The Innocence of Muslims.”

**5. Creating a Sectarian Conflict**

This section will discuss four issues that put a strain on Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt; the media coverage (2.5.1), the controversy between the Salafi Front and the Coptic Orthodox Church (2.5.2), the controversy over the Coptic diaspora (2.5.3) and the anti-Christian reactions (2.5.4).

**2.5.1 The Media Coverage: Manufacturing a Crisis**

The crisis of “The Innocence of Muslims” raised questions about the responsibility of the media, especially Egyptian Salafi channels, in drawing attention to this video. The
anchorman on the channel *al-Nās*, Khālid ‘Abd Allāh, played a significant role in creating the crisis of “The Innocence of Muslims” when this video was discussed on his program on 9 September 2012. However, the way in which other, non-Salafi, Egyptian media covered this event revealed that even these media bore some responsibility for creating this crisis and even played a role in producing “sectarian strife.”

This section will first give a brief overview of the media in Egypt and then analyze a sample of a few examples of media coverage; Khālid ‘Abdallah’s show, the stance of the Islamic preacher Wisām ‘Abd al-Warāth, two examples of *al-Yawm al-Sābi’, as well as one example of *al-Ahrām* and *Waṭanī*.

Throughout the last twenty years, even before the Revolution of 25 January 2011, the media landscape has significantly changed in Egypt, affecting both the written press and television. As a result, the coverage of the “Copts” has also changed. Since the 1990s, religious satellite channels have proliferated and have received generous funding from the Gulf region.420 *Al-Ahram Hebdo* criticizes these channels, especially *al-Ḥāfiẓ*, *al-Nās* and *al-Raḥma*, for having abandoned their initial purpose – religious teaching –, and turned to promoting political interests instead, becoming increasingly aggressive and intolerant (ibid). In this regard, the stance towards Copts has become more and more intolerant, clearly associating them with “*kufr*” (disbelief). For instance, after Shinūda III died, a Salafi preacher reportedly rejoiced over the death of ‘the head of disbelief and corruption,’ and the Gospel is often described as a ‘falsified book.’421 Similarly, the liberalization of the media in 2005 resulted in a more open discussion of inter-religious relations and clashes. As Elizabeth Iskander showed, this became a ‘hot topic’ that increased sales, while still covering the issue in the context of national unity (Iskander 2012, 32-33). Yet, ‘traditional’ media also ‘marginalise’ the Copts, as Hānī al-Jazīrī described it. In particular, he criticizes them for promoting some Coptic actors as representatives of “the Copts” as a whole, whereas these people actually have a peculiar stance towards the Church or are not capable of speaking in the media and thus tarnish the image of the Copts (al-Gazīrī 23 January 2015). Probably following the clash in al-ʿUmṛāniyya between Coptic protesters and the police over the building of a church, *al-Ahrām* wrote ‘le fait pour les Coptes d´être chouchoutés par l´Etat a donné un résultat inverse. Ils se sont sentis renforcés par l´étranger et ont eu la sensation d´être au-dessus de la loi parce qu´ils sont de la religion de

421 *Al-Shuruq*. 10 September 2012. منابر خاصة جدًا. Number 1318. Year 4. Page 17. This article is quoted in this section as “al-Shuruq 10 September 2012.”
l’Amérique’ (POC 2011, 167). This clearly contradicts journalistic deontology and implied that Copts are a fifth column of the United States in Egypt. Another issue surrounding media coverage of the Copts is the low average (which in fact affects all “minorities”) (al-Shuruq 10 September 2012) and the silence surrounding some events. For instance, following the Arab Spring, a clash in a village in al-Minyā Governorate causing the death of eleven Copts did not attract any media coverage (al-Shuruq 10 September 2012). In reaction, in recent years specific Coptic media have appeared, such as newspapers (al-katiba al-tibiyya, already mentioned) or Coptic channels, such as OTV (al-Shuruq 10 September 2012).

The discussion of the “The Innocence of Muslims” on Khālid ʿAbd Allāh’s show on 9 September 2012 questions the journalistic deontology used or shows the absence of it. However, the issue was mainly discussed by a researcher called Muḥammad Ḥamdī who was asked several questions by Khālid ʿAbd Allāh. Firstly, they discussed the general issue of a number of “aqbāṭ al-mahjar” repeatedly offending Islam. Thus, Muḥammad Ḥamdī mentioned various names, like Father Yuta, ʿIṣmat Zuqlama, Mūrīs Ṣādiq, Murquṣ ʿAzīz, Michael Munir, who have all offended Islam. For instance, “Father Yuta”, who actually does not exist (Elsässer 2014, 204), was said to have written a book and produced a film entitled “The Ass of Muhammad.” Yet, throughout the discussion, it becomes increasingly evident that the denomination “aqbāṭ al-mahjar” also referred to Christians in Egypt, whose reported hypocrisy and double standards were denounced. For instance, Muḥammad Ḥamdī criticized the fact that he could not grow a beard without having to face accusations of terrorism, whereas when a Copt does so he is referred to as a ‘cleric.’ In addition, he used subtle rhetorical devices such as stating that it did not make sense to discuss theological issues with the Christians, referred to as “masīḥiyyūn” and “aqbāṭ,” but actually asserts that Jesus Christ was crucified totally naked, asserting that he has the proof for that. Interestingly, although “The Innocence of Muslims” is viewed as yet another offense, which was the first part of a film soon coming released, the show screens several scenes lasting three minutes. Both state that Muslims do not stop being insulted and do not react.

In contrast, the comments of Wisām ʿAbd al-Warāth, preacher on the channel al-Hikma, were more moderate. On 7 September 2012, in a special declaration to al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ he called on ‘the Egyptian Church to make its position clear, either she distances herself from those individuals who produced this film or she remains silent, and this means her assent on this.’

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422 The video was downloaded by the author.
423 Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 7 September 2012. عبد الوارث: الفيلم المسيء للرسول تحرش نصراني تيار الإسلام السياسي. Doi. http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/7/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-
The video was described as a ‘Nazarene (naṣrānī)’ provocation against the stream of political Islam’ that was produced by ‘aqbāṭ al-mahjar,’ Terry Jones, and the Dutch government. He insisted: ‘we must not relieve the accession to the presidency of Egypt by Dr. Muḥammad Mursī – and he is an Islamic president who carries the banners of Islam – from the Nazarene provocation of Islamists.’ In addition, he called on Muslims not to appear any longer on the ‘Nazarene TV channel’ al-haqīqa (the truth). In contrast, the stances expressed in his discussion with Gamāl As’ad on al-Nahar TV on September 11 were much more moderate. However, he continued to call for the ‘Egyptian Church’ to dissociate from this video. Yet, he explained it was: ‘out of respect for the Muslim brothers, partners in this nation,’ stating that he would do the same. Interestingly, on the one hand, Wisām ‘Abd al-Warāth seems to have good knowledge of how the Coptic Orthodox Church works, as he defined ‘Bishop Bākhūmyūṣ as the temporary patriarch (qāʾim al-ʿamal)’ but on the other hand he seemingly refused to use the word “masihiyyūn” or Copt and only used “Nazarene,” something he did in a seemingly non-derogatory sense.

One of the first reports on “The Innocence of Muslims” was published by al-Yawm al-Sābi’ on 8 September 2012, i.e. before Khālid ‘Abdallah’s show. These two reports related the reactions of church leaders and political leaders; however, it can be assumed that these reactions were actually the result of al-Yawm al-Sābi’s attention. The first article, entitled “The Egyptian Churches reject a film offending Islam and the Messenger and attack its production […]” first explains the background of the condemnations and then quotes the reactions of three church leaders, the Coptic Orthodox Bishop Muqrūṣ, the Protestant Ṣafwat al-Biyāḍī, and the official spokesman of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Rafīq Garīsh. Al-Yawm al-Sābi’ wrote: ‘Reports on a number of Copts in the diaspora (aqbāṭ al-mahjar) producing a film offending Islam and the Messenger Muhammad (PBUH) […] has raised the resentment of the Evangelical, the Catholic and the Orthodox Egyptian Churches.’ According to the article, the video was

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424 YouTube. 9 September 2012.
425 Al-Yawm al-Sābi. 8 September 2012.
426 مصري ترفض تربية صناعها. الأنبا مرقص: "هؤلاء لا يتمتعون بأدب أو أخلاق". 8 September 2012.
produced by ʿIṣmat Zuqlama, Mūrīṣ Şādiq and Terry Jones, who – the article recalls – burnt the Quran ‘more than once.’

The second article published by al-Yawm al-Sābi’ on the same day, 8 September 2012, seemed to have asked a representative sample of Egyptian politicians for their opinion.\(^{427}\) This sample comprises Kārim Raḍwān, member of the Muslim Brotherhood; Muḥammad ʿImād al-Dīn, member of the Freedom and Justice Party; Bāsīl ʿĀdil, presented as a former MP and actually co-founder of the Free Egyptian Party, and ʿIffat al-Sādāt, secretary of ḥizb miṣr al-qawmī. Thus, this sample comprised two representatives of moderate political Islam, a Coptic politician and a member of the former regime, a “filūl.” As was previously shown, it seemed that they were asked similar questions, since they dealt with the same issues such as their views on Christianity and Christian Egyptians living abroad. The representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party share especially similar views. All in all, if it were not for the title, it would not be clear what the reactions were about. Subsequently, the article explains that:

A number of Copts in the diaspora \([aqbāṭ al-mahjar]\) [underlined by the author], and at their head, ʿIṣmat Zuqlama, who called for the partition of Egypt and president of the so-called Coptic state, and Mūrīṣ Şādiq, who can’t stop attacking Egypt in all international forums and turning foreign countries against her, and with them, the extremist priest Terry Jones, who has burnt copies of the Quran more than once, the production of a film about Muhammad (PBUH) which contains high offenses and great imputation against the noble Messenger, underlining the great hatred that animates the producers of the film of Islam and the great Messenger.

Thus, the article does not only comprise an analysis but also a judgment. It implies that the producers involved in this video are not limited to these three people but also comprise an unknown number of Copts. Then, the article adds:

At the same time, a number of Coptic Egyptian leaders [underlined by the author] condemned the film […] refusing any offense against the noble Messenger and condemning the production of a film which offends one of the prophets of God, as it offends Islam.

It can be suggested that in this stance, Jesus Christ is viewed as a prophet and thus “Islamized.” More importantly, the use of ‘a number of Copts in the diaspora’ on the one hand and of ‘a number of Coptic Egyptian leaders’ raises the question: What did the majority of Copts in Egypt

\[^{427}\] Al-Yawm al-Sabi. 8 September 2012.
think? The article establishes a dichotomy between “good” Copts showing their solidarity with Muslims and “bad” Copts participating in this “offense.”

A similar implicit suggestion is made by *al-Ahrām* in an article published on 12 September 2012.428 It introduced its article on the various reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” by defining the video as ‘the film offending the prophet (PBUH)’ produced by ‘some Copts in the diaspora (aqbāṭ al-mahjār) in the United States of America.’ Furthermore, the article overstates the protest at the US embassy both in terms of numbers and quality: ‘Thousands of Muslims and Christians participated, who showed their solidarity with their brothers against the insult of the noble Messenger.’ Thus, *al-Ahrām* not only employed the discourse of national unity but also used a systematic distinction between “Muslims” and “Christians.” Even more, it suggests the Christian as “the other” by underlining the show of solidarity ‘with their Muslim brothers.’

In sharp contrast, *Watani* emphasized the Egyptian belonging first and foremost; ‘the Egyptians condemned the film offending the Messenger.’ Again, trespassing on journalistic deontology, the newspaper speaks in the name of Coptic Egyptians: ‘The Copts were the first to demand a stand against the attempts to offend the Messenger (PBUH) and the Egyptians went out to protest in front of the US embassy,’ ‘this act was condemned by the three Churches and all Copts inside and outside.’429 Yet it also criticizes the violence and attitude of the government as well as the generalization of all Copts, especially Copts living abroad, because of the action of two individuals.

All these examples show to varying degree the lack of journalistic deontology, either by explicitly accusing a certain group – the Copts –, or by using linguistic devices leading the reader to question this group’s real intentions, or speaking in the name of that group.

2.5.2 The Controversy between the Church and the Salafi Front

Despite efforts to display a moderate attitude towards Copts, as shown previously, some accusations were leveled by the Salafi stream against a few people. In particular, the Salafi Front (*al-jabha al-salafiyya*) became involved in a controversy with the Coptic Orthodox Church. This issue displayed a potential for escalation. The Salafi Front was established in 2010 and defines itself as a ‘league comprising a number of independent Salafi and Islamist

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428 Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012. غضب شعبي من الإساءة للرسول. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.
In October 2012, it established a Salafi political party the “People’s party,” probably in reaction to the ongoing tensions in the Nur Party.

This controversy started with Salafi accusations ascribing the responsibility for the video to “Father Yuta.” This “ab Yūtā” is a Coptic cyber-activist who garnered fame in 2008 when he wrote a response to the novel Azazel by Yusef Ziedan (Elsässer 2014, 204). According to Sebastian Elsässer, however, “Father Yuta” does not exist. Following the thwarted assault on the US embassy in Cairo, Father Murquṣ ʿAzīz expressed his anger over his name being mentioned in a list by the general prosecutor forbidding nine people from entering Egypt. He denied that he was “Father Yuta.” Murquṣ ʿAzīz was seemingly sent away to Australia (Casper 2011). Similarly, on September 13, al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ reported on a telephone call from Šālīb Matā Sāwīr to Nādir Bakkār about the Salafi Front having described him on their Facebook page as “Ab Yuta,” something which he denied. Eventually, the controversy reached the higher-ranking church leadership.

Around 19 September 2012, the Salafi Front and the National Center for the Protection of Freedom (al-markaz al-waṭanī li l-difāʿ an al-ḥurriyāt) sent a report to the general prosecutor comprising a list of three clerics – Bishop Serapion (Sirābiyūn) of Los Angeles, Father Zakaryā Buṭrus, and Father Murquṣ ʿAzīz – as well as six other persons, allegedly involved in the making of “The Innocence of Muslims” – among them Jūzīf Naṣr Allah, Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā, Muṣʿab Ḥasan Yusif and Cindy Lee Garcia. In reaction, the Holy Synod met for an urgent meeting on Friday 21 September 2012. This meeting reportedly lasted four hours.
and gathered Bishop Mūsā, Bishop Murqus and Bishop Tūmās, as well as Bishop Bākhūmyūs, members of the Lay Council, the Coptic Endowments and the legal authority of the Church. At the subsequent press conference, the spokesman for the Coptic Orthodox Church, Bishop Būlā, rejected all accusations against the three clerics, especially against Bishop Sirābiyūn (al-Ahram 22 September 2012). In response, the Salafi Front reacted by rejecting the ‘language of threat’ reportedly used by Bishop Būlā; ‘the Egyptian Church is not above the law and the state is not above the law, it is one of the institutions of the state’ (al-Shuruq 23 September 2012). These formulations are very telling, as the Coptic Orthodox Church is clearly defined on the one hand as a national, Egyptian institution, and on the other hand as a state institution, perhaps similar to the dār al-iftāʾ. To some extent, this can be seen as accusing the church of being too independent and the Christians of not complying with the laws. The Salafi Front continued: ‘We demand the implementation of the rule of law (dawlat al-qānūn) on the “bigs” before the “smalls,” and the implementation of the principles of justice and equality’ (ibid). This statement showed an acceptance of the law, even though it is not Sharia law and seems to suggest a recognition of the principle of equality. In response, eight Coptic Orthodox Bishops from Europe and the United States wrote a letter to President Mursī, as well as the priests of the diocese of Los Angeles (al-Shuruq 23 September 2012), Bishop Hadrā of Aswān, and the priests of the diocese Aswān issued a statement. Eventually, Bishop Sirābiyūn rejected the accusations in an interview with al-Ḥurrā, emphasizing his inability to know what Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā and Jūzīf Naṣṣ Allāh did, since they did not attend his church.

All these statements and reactions by the Christian clerics are interesting because they made extensive use of the discourse of national unity in order to counter the accusations of the Salafi Front. For instance, Ṣāliḥ Matā Sāwwīrs rejected the accusations as ‘lies, calumny, and attempts to spread strife and destabilization in Egypt.’ Similarly, Bishop Būlā accused the Salafi Front of being enemies of the Egyptian nation; ‘we completely reject the attempts at slander between the sons of the united nation and the spread of discord […] they are the enemies

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436 Al-Shuruq. 23 September 2012.
437 Al-Ahram. 22 September. باخوميوس: التعدى على الأديان يحتاج لموقف حازم. Number 45946. Year 137. Page 3. This source is quoted in this section “al-Ahram 22 September 2012.”
440 Al-Hurrā. 19 September 2012.
of our nation in which we have lived for 14 centuries, crushing the most conscious example of unity. The bishops of the southern US, Germany, England, US, Ireland, Turin and Rome, Virginia, and Scandinavia likewise accused the movement of threatening national unity; ‘these notifications offend national unity and stoke the fire of discord. [For this reason] we call on your Excellence [President Mursi] to protect the nation and to defend the innocents.’ Similarly, Bishop Sirābiyūn’s defense is undertaken by referring to his patriotism. He was known in Aswān for ‘his intense love for Egypt. […] he was bearing Egypt and its concerns in his heart and mind wherever he went.’

**Summary of Section 2.5.2**

The controversy between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Salafi Front is interesting because they used different strategies to back their criticism. On the one hand, the Salafi Front viewed the church as an Egyptian national and state institution that reportedly had too much autonomy. On the other hand, various actors of the church employed the discourse of national unity to counter and delegitimize any criticism.

**2.5.3 The Case of the Coptic Diaspora**

During the crisis of “The Innocence of Muslims,” responsibility for the video was often ascribed to the “Copts in the diaspora” or “some Copts in the diaspora” (aqtāt al-mahjar). In an article in al-Ṣalāḥ, the Coptic Catholic church recalled that the “Coptic diaspora” is a very young phenomenon compared to the Christian Lebanese, Syrian, or Palestinian diasporas; it came into being after the Revolution of 1952 when wealthy Copts began to emigrate due to nationalization. More specifically, the article criticized the reports of an increase in Coptic migration following the Revolution of 25 January 2011 because it would provoke a breakdown of the Egyptian economy, of which one third is reliant on Coptic investments (ibid). Moreover, Bishop Gabriel of Austria remarked that Muslim Egyptian emigration was much higher (Gabriel, Bishop 11 September 2015). Coptic Egyptians in the diaspora are very diverse; some are close to the Church and lacking a centralized organization, as al-Shuruq suggested; some are not close to the church at all, as the background of “The Innocence of Muslims”

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showed. Therefore, Bishop Gabriel suggested that in the West ‘anyone can say what he wants’ (Gabriel, Bishop 11 September 2015).

To some extent, the Coptic organizations and actors, especially in the United States, have been very vocal and even virulent in their support for Coptic rights in Egypt, sometimes attacking the Egyptian state and the Church for their silence and passivity (POC 2009, 165). *Proche-Orient Chrétien* states that so far, the Coptic Orthodox Church has always distanced herself from this criticism (ibid). However, it was thanks to the Coptic diaspora that the dismissal of Shinūda III by Anwar al-Sādāt in the 1970s reached the international consciousness and the pope was recognized by Amnesty International as a ‘prisoner of conscience’ (Reiss 1998, 232). Furthermore, it was in the diaspora that the idea of the Copts being the ‘true and pure Egyptians. The others are invaders’ first emerged and was particularly promoted by Shawky Karas and Mūrīš Sādiq (Guirguis 2012, 69-70). According to Laure Guirguis, it subsequently influenced the discourse of the Coptic Orthodox clergy and finally led Bishop Bishūy to praise the hospitality of Copts who welcomed Muslims (ibid). The video “The Innocence of Muslims” was also an occasion for *al-Yawm al-Sābi ’* to report on and, in fact, to criticize the so-called Copts in the diaspora. Entitling the article “From Emigration to Conspiracy,” the newspaper accused the Christian Egyptians living abroad of receiving American and Israeli funding in order to create “sectarian strife’ in Egypt and thus fulfill the goals of ‘worldwide Zionism.” All those efforts are undermined by *al-Yawm al-Sābi ’*s quoting of Bishop Mūsā who allegedly stated that anyone who ‘seeks refuge in international support is a traitor.’

In the context of “The Innocence of Muslims,” Egyptian newspapers evoked the reactions of a number of Coptic organizations in the diaspora. However, the content of the reactions varied according to the newspaper. Non-religious newspapers reported only the condemnations, whereas the Coptic newspaper *Waṭanī* reported a more balanced view. The statement by 120 Coptic organizations, the statement by the Union of Coptic Organizations

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446 *Al-Yawm al-Sabi*. 15 September 2012. ننشر أكير ملف عنهم ونكشف مصادر تمويلهم. رحلة أقباط المهجر من الرحيل إلى الموازنة. عدنا سنة مؤتمرات وخططوا للتفجير. ولن喥وا بالفيلم المسيء. و"المؤامرة و." Doi: http://www.youm7.com/story/2012/9/15/%D9%86%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1_%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%A8%D8%B1_%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%87%D9%85_%D9%88%D9%8D%D9%8C_%D8%B4%D9%81_%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81_%D8%A9%D8%A7%D8%B7_%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1_%D9%85%D9%86/786353#.VjJGxG5OfVJ (retrieved May 23, 2016).

in Europe, the United Copts in Switzerland, the Coptic-Dutch Organization and Geneva (al-Yawm al-Sabi 11 September 2012) were reported as condemning the video. Interestingly, some of these organizations made use of the discourse of national unity to back their condemnation. The Union of United Copts in Switzerland accused the producers of the video of receiving foreign funding and aiming to stir sectarian strife in Egypt. It called on the Church, the Copts, and all who have an official position to ‘take a stand against those who want to destabilize Egypt, [both] Muslims and Copts’ (al-Yawm al-Sabi 11 September 2012). Similarly, as ‘Coptic Egyptians,’ the Coptic-Dutch Organization expressed its ‘respect for all revealed religions’ and insisted on its dissociation from this video which allegedly seeks to stir up ‘a fight between the sons of the united nation’ (al-Yawm al-Sabi 11 September 2012). Likewise, ‘Awd Shafiq, president of the legal office of Copts in the diaspora in Geneva, denied that Muris Sadiq and Ismat Zuqlama had any national consciousness (al-Yawm al-Sabi’ 11 September 2012). In contrast, Watani reported more balanced views on this issue. The Coptic Organization of California insisted on not making Copts living abroad and, even less, Copts living in Egypt responsible for ‘the acts of two persons or of a group!’ and recalled that in the United States, the ‘country of freedom,’ even Jesus Christ is made fun of. In a harsher way, Hanhi Habib, chief editor of Nayel News in California asked ‘Why all these attacks and accusations on all Copts in the diaspora […] Do millions of Egyptians reduce the Copts in the diaspora to one extremist, Muris Sadiq?’ and ‘How can we ask others to respect our dogmas and then ridicule their dogmas?’ (ibid).

Eventually, the Coptic activist Michael Munir, mostly resident abroad, mentioned a more negative scenario, stating that like the Jews, the Copts would soon leave Egypt. He rejected any generalization of all Copts.

This section showed the selective reporting by the Egyptian media. Non-religious media mostly reported Coptic organizations’ in the West condemnation and pledge of loyalty, whereas Watani also quoted stances that were more critical of the reactions in Egypt.

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448 Al-Ahram. 12 September 2012.  غضب شعبي من الإساءة للرسول. Number 45936. Year 137. Pages 1 and 5.
449 Al-Yawm al-Sahi. 11 September 2012. انفجست المؤسسات الدينية ضد الفيلم المسيء للرسول.. “الأزهر”: الداعون لإنتاجه هدفهم إشعال الفتنة.. “الإفتاء”: ليس من الحرية ويمس أقدس رمز للمسلمين.. و"أقباط المهجر": نتبرأ من موريس صادق وزقلمة. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Yawm al-Sabi 11 September 2012.”
2.5.4 Anti-Christian Reactions

The journalist and chief editor of the newspaper Watani, Yusif Sidhum (Youssef Sidhom), concluded that the crisis of “The Innocence of Muslims” had not caused backlashes against Christians in Egypt.⁴⁵² Indeed, compared to the recurrent clashes between Christians and Muslims in Egypt, which are often triggered by personal or economic matters, the backlashes were limited. However, a few events in connection to this video can be described as “Anti-Christian reactions.” These events are the anti-Christian slogans at the protest at the US embassy in Cairo and in particular the burning of a Bible by “Abū Islām,” the fatwā issued by a Salafi imam, the arrest of an inhabitant of the slum of Ezbet el-Nakhl (‘Izbat al-Nakhl) in Cairo, and the attacks on the houses of the network behind this video.

The most spectacular anti-Christian reaction in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims” was the burning of a Bible by the Salafi and director of the TV channel al-Rahma, Ahmad 'Abdullah, nicknamed “Abū Islām” (father of Islam). Previously, Copts Today reported that calls were made to burn down churches during the protests at the US embassy.⁴⁵³ On September 15, at a similar protest, Abū Islām burnt a copy of a bible and called for people to urinate on bibles.⁴⁵⁴ Interestingly, this event seemed not to have been reported in the media until the prosecution of Abū Islām. For instance, al-Ahrām only mentioned it on 30 September 2012⁴⁵⁵ and al-Shurūq on 26 September 2012⁴⁵⁶ when his trial started. In addition, this act was also condemned by several Islamist actors. Thirty-five notifications were sent to the general prosecutor, amongst them one by al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya.⁴⁵⁷ A lawsuit was instigated against Aḥmad 'Abdullah and his son and journalist Hānī Yāsīn,⁴⁵⁸ and in January 2013 Abū Islām was condemned to eleven years of prison⁴⁵⁹ for ‘crimes of despising the Christian religion,’ and

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⁴⁵² Al-Hurra. 19 September 2012.
⁴⁵⁹ Watani. 12 June 2013. "الحكم بالسجن لأبو إسلام 11 سنة ولاية لمدة سنتين". Doi: http://www.wataninet.com/%D8%A3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%A9%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AB/D9%85/121024/ (retrieved May 23, 2016).
desecrating its religious symbol, the Gospel,’ and his son to eight years of prison.\textsuperscript{460} In addition, the action had drawn broad condemnation from leading political and Salafi actors. ‘Imād ʿAbd al-Ghafūr condemned it in a Friday sermon he gave on 14 September 2012 as ‘uncalculated and forbidden behavior.’\textsuperscript{461} Similarly, Yāsir al-Burhāmī, deputy secretary of al-daʿwa al-salafiyya, issued a fatwā condemning the burning of the bible, for ‘it is never permissible.’\textsuperscript{462} He conceded, however, that ‘it is correct that the gospel contains paragraphs and parts of the revealed Gospel, and there is monotheism and proof of the prophecies which assert the correctness of its meaning.’\textsuperscript{463} Yāsir al-Burhāmī also questioned the correctness of the Torah, falsified with ‘distortions and changes.’ Thus it is not the Torah that was revealed to Moses. In addition, the member of the Shura Council of the Muslim Brotherhood, ‘Ashūr al-Hilwānī, focused more on the potential impact of this act which ‘calls for discord (fitna),’ and had the following to say about Christians: ‘They are our brothers in the nations and we live with them in affection and mutual respect.’\textsuperscript{464} However, these condemnations did not seem to be unanimous, as a Salafi imam called Ahmad Fuʿād al-Qāshūsh issued a fatwā in which he called on Muslim youths in the United States to kill the producers of the video, whom he described as ‘unbelievers.’\textsuperscript{465}

With regards to the assaults on the houses of three of the people involved in the video, i.e. on their family, there is some confusion. On September 19, al-Ahram reported that roughly two hundred ‘people’ attacked the house of Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā’s mother and that the police had to intervene to protect her.\textsuperscript{466} However, as al-Ahrām mentioned that Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā had emigrated to the United States ten years ago – which is not correct –, it is not certain that this was really Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā. Copts Today reported a similar event on 18 September 2012 in which the house of Jūzīf Naṣr Allāh was attacked in Gizeh by ‘Salafis.’\textsuperscript{467} The house of Mūrīs Sādiq was also reportedly attacked and the police did not interfere.\textsuperscript{468} Interestingly,

\textsuperscript{461} Al-Shuruq. 15 September 2012.
\textsuperscript{462} Copts Today. 14 September 2012. 
\textsuperscript{463} Lebanon Files. 18 September 2012.
\textsuperscript{466} Lebanon Files. 18 September 2012.
\textsuperscript{467} Al-Tahrir. Doi: http://www.al-tahrir.net/2012/09/19/1206.html
\textsuperscript{468} Copts Today. 13 September 2012.

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however, the article by al-Ahrām provoked many reactions by readers who criticized this attack on ‘innocent people’ and emphasized the message of mercy and love of Muhammad. 

Lastly, the police arrested an inhabitant of the slum ‘Izbat al-Nakhl in Cairo because he had posted a link to the video and had thus reportedly provoked the anger of his neighbors. According to Le Monde, the police arrested him in order to protect him.

Very few media investigated the impact of “The Innocence of Muslims” on Copts in Egypt. Al-Sharq al-Awsat reportedly investigated the impact and concluded that it was limited to the area around the US embassy in Cairo and that, in general, the Copts were more anxious since the Muslim Brotherhood had acceded to power. Similarly, Rāmī Kāmil, a member of the Maspero Youth Union, underlined that this fear would remain as long as the state ‘remains silent on the violations of our rights’. Former MP Muna Mukkaram, asserted that the Church played a key role in ‘diverting the anger against the Christians in the country’ (ibid). Interestingly, editor Caroline Kāmil (Kārūlīn Kāmil) reported in al-Shurūq on her experience on Ramses Street in downtown Cairo, when she asked herself ‘Why does an angry street demand that I excuse myself for something I did not do?’ and wrote about a man who shouted at her: ‘unbelievers of the haters of the monkeys and the pigs.

Summary of Section 2.5.4

This section has shown both Anti-Christian events and the efforts by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Nur Party, al-da’wa al-salafiyya, and al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya to counter these. Interestingly, while al-da’wa al-salafiyya issued a fatwa, al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya took legal measures.

Conclusion to Chapter 2

The production and promotion of a video by a small Coptic extremist network could have had dangerous consequences for Copts in Egypt.

Besides the very negative depiction of Muhammad, these dire consequences could have resulted from the role the media played in this context. Salafi media drew attention to this video.

469 Al-Ahrām. 19 September 2012.
470 Le Monde. 20 September 2012.
472 Al-Safir. 22 September 2012.
473 Al-Shuruq. 13 September 2012.
Yet, in a similar and a more disguised way, general media in Egypt also played an escalating role, as they discussed the video before the assault on the US embassy took place. Similarly, the reports on the reactions from the Islamist and secular parties, al-Azhar and the muftī seem to suggest that it was actually the media that connected this video with the Copts in Egypt. Another potential cause for violent backlashes against Christians in Egypt was the seemingly complete failure of the state to provide security for embassies and assert control over downtown Cairo.

A very broad range of actors in Egypt reacted to the video and tried to mobilise against it. First of all, the churches were very vocal in voicing their condemnation of the video. The Coptic Orthodox Church in particular reacted many times as part of a collective effort. Similarly, a number of Coptic Christian organizations and Christian actors issued comments on “The Innocence of Muslims” and tried to contribute to the dissociation of Christians in Egypt from it. Besides this, the official Islamic institutions, Islamist and Salafi parties and organizations voiced their condemnation and tried to mobilise. In contrast, the attitude of President Muḥammad Mursī was seen as rather passive and as failing to meet the alleged expectations of the people. Overall, the various actors seemed to have seen the video as an opportunity to exploit for their personal interests. For instance, the muftī was able to fashion himself as the very embodiment of Sunni Islam, although this role is usually attributed to al-Azhar (see further below). For Islamist and Salafi actors, this “crisis” was also an opportunity to appear as moderate and serious political contenders. In addition, a number of secular and moderate Islamic political parties condemned the video but their level of mobilization was low. Besides this, a mobilization also took place without any leadership or a minimum level of organization.

Overall, the video was rarely mentioned by its title and in every case it was understood as a film. In many instances, “The Innocence of Muslims” was simply referred to as an “offense,” as “despising religions,” an “attack,” “an insult” to Islam, Muhammad, muqaddasāt, Muslims, to provoke their feelings. It seemed that no actor, except for al-daʿwa al-salafiyya and the Coalition of Egypt’s Copts had actually seen the video. A few other Christian organizations discussed the history of the video to point out the manufactured crisis. In addition, the video was also seen as an “assault” on human rights and a distortion of the image of Islam. In many reactions the video was denounced for allegedly aiming to provoke sectarian strife and divisions in Egypt. The Coptic intellectual Gaḥāl Asʿad connected the video to the alleged plan of emptying Egypt of its Copts.
To some extent, the counter-argumentation to “The Innocence of Muslims” as an “offense” to Islam (and not denouncing the violence against Copts in Egypt) was very elaborate in some instances. For instance, the muftī tried to promote a positive image of Islam, while the shaykh al-Azhar developed a long analysis of the West. Some Islamist actors connected the video to the alleged Western fear of the spread of Islam and an Islamic awakening. In a number of reactions, the video was seen as an example of the alleged double standards of the West when it comes to this very freedom of speech which, according to the actors in Egypt, is quite often a pretence to offend religious contents and feelings. As a result, many actors called for international laws to prohibit such acts. Interestingly, a few Christian organizations and actors demanded the Egyptian government strip the producers of the video of their Egyptian citizenship. Other, mostly Islamist, actors called on Muḥammad Mursī to temporarily suspend diplomatic relations with the United States.

The discussions of the video’s background by the various actors suggest a strategy to dissociate the Christians in Egypt from the video. In this regard a certain progression seemed to have taken place, from discussing the involvement of “a number of Copts in the diaspora” in the video towards a vague background, sometimes connected to the US or “Zionism.” While the protest at the US embassy on 11 September 2012 clearly designated Mūrīs Ṣādiq the producer of the video, and the media widely discussed Coptic involvement, the various Islamic actors increasingly turned vague when mentioning this issue. At first the Nur Party even misunderstood the video as a “Dutch film.” Overall, all Islamist parties and organizations increasingly ascribed a very vague background to the video. For instance, al-daʿwa al-salafiyya conceded the Coptic background but insisted on the need not to extend the generalization to all Copts in Egypt and instead made Zionism responsible. Similarly, the churches either remained silent on the involvement of Copts in the diaspora or implicitly acknowledged it by dissociating Christians in Egypt from the video.

Avoiding a clear background to the video can be understood as a strategy by Islamic actors to dissociate Christians in Egypt from it. In particular, the attitudes of Islamist parties and organizations were very telling and surprising as they consistently tried to prevent backlashes against Christians. Usually intolerant actors like al-daʿwa al-salafiyya and its political arm the Nur Party, al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya and the Building and Construction Party all displayed great efforts in this direction and insisted on the Copts being part of the Egyptian nation. Another strategy was to distinguish between “bad” Copts who had participated in the video, and “good” Copts who condemned the video. On the one hand, these stances were
defined by the requirements of a new competitive and democratic environment and also by radical elements within the streams that compelled them to appear moderate. On the other hand, these stances also showed a consistent effort to protect Christians, as the burning of the Gospel by Abu Islam were condemned and attracted counter-measures (legal prosecution, issuing a fatwā). At the same time, however, the Islamist stream in general – preachers, organizations, media, politics – seemed to expect “the Christians” and their institutions to condemn this film, and basically to show solidarity and loyalty. In this regard, the Christian Egyptians were designated by these actors mostly as “Christians,” and “Copts.” In a few cases, al-daʿwa al-salafiyya and preacher Wisām ʿAbd al-Warāth also used the Quranic term “Nazarenes.” Particularly interesting were the unintended acknowledgments of the Copts being part of Egypt. For instance, although the Salafi Front engaged in a harsh controversy with the Coptic Orthodox Church, it implicitly acknowledged the church as a national, state institution. Similarly, in many instances, like that of the mufīṭ, Christian diversity was reduced to “one Egyptian Church.” At the same time, however, the various Christian-Muslim reactions displayed the need for Coptic visibility and participation to legitimize the protests against the video. The extent to which various Islamist actors and parties participated in or organized protests, conferences and visits suggests that these were another means to increase their political credentials. The protests and conferences were more strongly dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, while, for instance al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya failed to attract high-ranking Christian actors.

On the other hand, the Christian reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” were interesting in terms of motivations, strategies used, and criticisms directed at the reactions in Egypt to the video. As previously underlined, the crisis of the “The Innocence of Muslims” was a very dangerous moment for the Christians in Egypt. The fear of backlashes against Copts was expressed in some instances, especially by the April 6 Movement and Father Filūbātir Gamīl ʿAzīz. In most reactions, however, this fear was not expressed at all but was evident in the number of reactions and the diversity of actors who reacted. In particular, the fact that the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church met three times to discuss this issue clearly hints at the danger. Yet, the tone and the content of the reactions of the Coptic Catholic Church suggest that the feeling of fear was not widely present. In addition, other factors served to motivate the Christian reactions. The content of the reactions and previous reactions to similar events (books, films) demonstrated that the Coptic Orthodox Church often resorts to censorship.

The Christian reactions showed that various strategies were used to dissociate Christians in Egypt from this video. First of all, all Christian reactions condemned “The Innocence of
Muslims.” Secondly, the Coptic Orthodox Church in particular established itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Christians in Egypt (and abroad). Similarly, a number of Christian actors claimed to speak in the name of Christians. Thirdly, various Christian actors and institutions, such as the churches and some Coptic organizations were very proactive not only in participating in joint Christian-Muslim reactions but also in taking the initiative for inclusive protests, conferences, and visits. A fourth strategy was to discuss and question the background of the video; either by minimising the involvement of Copts in the diaspora (not mentioning them, or emphasising the Egyptian identity of the producers instead of the Coptic identity, or defining it as an individual act). Some Christian actors ascribed the video to Zionism. In this regard, some Christian actors and organizations (especially those discussed in Section 2.3.2) reduced the background to the involvement of Mūrīs Ṣādiq – and thus recognized the involvement of “a Copt in the diaspora” – but pointed to the history of controversy over this person within the Coptic community in Egypt. A fifth strategy which was especially used by the churches was the counter-argument that the “offenses” displayed in the video contradicted Christianity and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Finally, a key strategy was the use of the discourse of national unity. Yet this discourse was not only used to express complete solidarity with Muslims but also to counter criticisms directed against Christians in September 2012 (this issue will be discussed below).

In contrast, there was very little criticism uttered by Christian actors and institutions during the crisis. For instance, the violent reactions and the storming of the US embassy were only criticised by a minor cleric in al-Minūfiyya. Besides this, only a very few Coptic organizations and some more in the diaspora criticised some issues, like the alleged double standards in Egypt when it comes to offensive religious content. Interestingly, Filūbātir Gamīl ṬAzīz is the only Coptic actor who openly criticised the very fact that the presidency, the official Islamic institutions and Islamist actors had contributed to creating the “crisis” of “The Innocence of Muslims.” Overall, it seemed that the criticism was formulated by “minor” actors, i.e. the Coptic Catholic Church and the non-recognized Evangelical churches because Islamist actors tended to consider the Coptic Orthodox Church the sole representative and spokesman of the Copts.

Given all these results, the crisis of “The Innocence of Muslims” was also interesting as it raised the question of Christian-Muslim coexistence in Egypt. In this regard, the reactions to the video displayed a very high level of denial both by Christian and Muslim actors who simply did not discuss the accusations uttered in the first part of the video and instead consistently
underlined national unity. Although this unity was consistently emphasised, there were no elaborate discussions about what this unity consisted of. Muslim actors in particular reduced Christian-Muslim coexistence to a brotherhood and the systematic distinction between Christians and Muslims when formulating unity. In contrast, representatives of the Coptic Orthodox Church formulated a coexistence that rested on shared values, the same monotheism, the same history and an almost biological unity (“woven fabric”). Overall, both Christian and Muslim actors mainly framed religious coexistence in the context of national unity. This discourse of national unity with its structured slogans was pervasive. It was a means used by Christian actors to divert attention for something that was produced in the United States. It was an approach that pervaded the attitude of the media (connecting a video produced abroad with an expected solidarity by Christians), the state, and the Islamist parties and organizations. Yet, to some extent, it was within this framework of national unity that a partnership, equality, and coexistence with the “Nazarenes” was possible and thinkable, although it contradicted the increasingly intolerant stance of the Salafi stream towards Copts. Thus, the discourse of “al-waṭan al-wāḥid” was also a means to appear more moderate and more pragmatic.

Finally, a key issue was the political benefit many Muslim actors could draw from “The Innocence of Muslims.” Firstly, many Islamist political actors put pressure on Muḥammad Mursī to take a firm position to expose him as a “Muslim” president who reportedly failed the expectations of the people in Egypt. Secondly, many actors tried to take the lead in this issue and to mobilise via protests and conferences. As previously mentioned, expressing support for the Christians and protecting them against backlashes was another way to appear to be a moderate and serious actor. Yet, those very actors – the Nur Party for instance – were also pressured by the course of events, especially by the extremist and violent reactions in the own ranks. In addition, the fact that on the one hand, “the street” seemingly expected a strong Muslim reaction against the video and that, on the other hand, members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nur Party adapted their positions (for instance exonerating the US nationals) forecasts a likely break between the leadership and the base.
Chapter 3 Lebanon: Resisting Zionism

Introduction

Chapter Content and Sources

The chapter will start with a description of the protests to highlight the discrepancy between Hezbollah’s peaceful protests against the video and the clashes and lack of leadership which characterised reactions in Sunni areas (3.1). The chapter aims to show how Hezbollah and its partner, the Amal Movement, basically “created” the event of “The Innocence of Muslims.” The chapter will then analyse the different reactions displayed by political partners (3.2), official Islamic institutions and churches (3.3), the state (3.4), and non-political Islamic, Islamist, Christian, and other actors (3.5). Finally, a long section is dedicated to the broad range of joint Christian-Muslim relations at various levels (3.6).

This analysis is mainly based on reports in Lebanese newspapers and church media. Moreover, al-Tawḥīd, the website of the Islamist organization ḥarakat al-tawḥīd al-islāmī, (see Section 5.3.15) was especially valuable as it cited many reactions.

Lebanon is a unique case in the Middle East, as on the one hand it is the country where “sectarianism” is politically most deeply rooted and implemented, yet it is this political system of confessionalism which guarantees a Christian (Maronite) hold over the state. However, the state does not have one official religion. Lebanon recognizes eighteen communities. In addition, four churches have their see in Lebanon; the Maronite Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church of Cilicia, the Armenian Catholic Church, and the Syriac Catholic Church (Pucini 1997, 354-355). Moreover, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek Catholic Melkite Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Chaldean Church, the Latin Church (Roman Catholic Church), and the Assyrian Church also have one or several dioceses there (ibid). Besides, the Greek Catholic Patriarchate, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, and the Syriac Orthodox have several sees; Damascus, Ain Traz (Lebanon) and Rabieh (Lebanon); Damascus, Balamand (Lebanon); Damascus and Atchana (Lebanon) respectively. The seminar of the Syriac Orthodox Church was located for some time in Atchana.

An Ongoing Demographic Conflict

The number of Christians in Lebanon is estimated at 36%, i.e. roughly one million of the 4.2 million inhabitants of Lebanon (Heyberger 2013, 17). However, the political system
does not reflect this new reality but is based on a census carried out in 1932 (Heyberger 2013, 15). Since then, the proportion of Christians has decreased due to lower birth rates and a high level of emigration.

To some extent, there has been an ongoing silent war over demographics. In the 1920s, displaced Armenians who had survived the genocide and had been relocated to Lebanon were granted Lebanese citizenship (Migliorino 2008, 54). Similarly, Christian Palestinians who fled to Lebanon in 1948 and 1967 were granted easier access to citizenship (Mikdashi 2011). Therefore, Maya Makdashi concludes that the issue of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is actually a problem of ‘poor Sunni Muslims’ (ibid). Recently, the former Maronite Bishop of Baalbek and Dayr al-Aḥmar, Samʿān ‘Aṭāʿ Allāh (whose reaction to the video will be mentioned further below), expressed his concerns over the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon:

We have two million Syrians in the country as refugees. […] Many will return to their homeland when the war is over. But many refugees will remain and apply for Lebanese citizenship in ten years. […] What will become of us Christians then? … They defile crosses, statues of the Virgin Mary. 474

While there is competition over demographics, the various political forces on both Muslim and Christian sides have made accommodations and benefited from this confessional system. However, among these communities, only a few control the most important positions: The president is a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, the speaker of the parliament a Shia Muslim, and the vice speaker of parliament a Greek Orthodox Christian.

The Question of Sectarianism

Lebanon is often regarded in the Arab world as counter-model because of the politicisation and institutionalisation of communities, i.e. ṭāʾifyya (“confessionalism” or “sectarianism”). However, there has been much scholarly discussion in recent years about the essentializing approach to sectarianism in Lebanon. Ussama Makdisi stated that sectarianism ‘is the modern story’ (Makdisi 2000, 2) whose institutionalisation started in 1860 with the civil war in Mount Lebanon. However, Makdisi insists on the economic, demographic, and social background of this war rather than on its religious dimension. Prior to the nineteenth century, the Druze constituted the dominant class in Mount Lebanon, and in the nineteenth century poor Maronites settled to cultivate of silk, agriculture, and practise crafts, repopulating areas left

behind by Shias (De Clerck 2008, 60-61). Factors including economic hardship, land scarcity, the demographic explosion of Maronites, the Ottoman reforms, and the Egyptian occupation in 1840, upset this equilibrium (see Makdisi 2000, 98). When Muhammad ´Ali’s army occupied Mount Lebanon in 1840, it imposed conscription and provoked a revolt by both Druze and Maronites. When the Maronites began revolting against the Druze landlords, the Druze massacred Maronites in 1860 in an effort to “cleanse” the area and re-assert their presence (Makdisi 2000, 139). It up-rooted thousands and, more importantly, resulted in a memory of animosity (Makdisi 2000, 98). Subsequently, Mount Lebanon was divided between an area dominated politically by Christians and an area dominated politically by Druze. Under the French Mandate, the sectarian system was further developed and opposed by Sunni Muslim leaders: ‘tandis que le pays est uni, on essaie de découper la communauté musulmane en sectes … alors que Sunnites, Chiites, Druzes, Alaouites forment un seul peuple et viennent d’une même source’ (Rondot 1947, 68).

Interestingly, the sectarian system has resulted in several outcomes. It has increased the importance of so called sectarian leaders (al-zu’amāʾ ṭāʾifīyyūn) upon whom entire communities depend for their economic and social welfare (see Mikdashi 2012). In addition, the creation of religious institutions for the Muslim communities (the “clericalisation” of Islam) has led to attempts by political leaders to encroach on and influence these religious leaders, in particular the Sunni and Druze communities (see Section 3.3.1). Furthermore, the survival of the sectarian system – initially justified as a temporary evil (Mikdashi 2011) - has led smaller communities to establish their own sectarian institutions in order to compensate for their lack of representation within the state. This “sectarianization” of communities has affected the Alawi, the Syriac Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox, and the Greek Catholic communities to varying degrees.475

When looking more closely at the pre-civil war situation in Lebanon, it becomes clear that the cleavages were not so much along religious lines – as the Christian militias later claimed – but rather along socio-economic default lines. Georges Corm notes that these main default lines were between Mount Lebanon and the cities along the coast (Corm 1992, 149). Thus, in Beirut, where Sunni Muslims and the Greek Orthodox have historically dominated, the Maronites were considered recent migrants (Heyberger 2013, 87). During the Civil War, socio-economically marginalised communities, such as the Maronites and the Shia, used militias to overthrow the elite (Corm 1992, 77). For some time, the Christian Maronite Kataeb (ḥizb al-katatāʾib al-lubnāniyya) even demanded an end to the sectarian system (Rondot 1947, 99).

475 See Sections 3.3.1; 3.5.2; 3.3.2 and 3.5.2; 3.5.2
Furthermore, Georges Corm qualifies the idea of a passive, non-interventionist state, and refers to the political economy of President Fu‘ād Shihāb (Corm 1992, 151), which was similar to Gamāl ’Abd al-Nāṣir’s policy.

All in all, the actors of the Civil War followed both a sectarian logic and an aim at social upheaval. For instance, the Christian militias were involved in the religious cleansing of what would become an embryonic Christian state in Eastern Beirut. While under the Druze leader Walīd Junbalāṭ (Walīd Junbalāṭ), the Christians living in the Shūf were displaced in a similar way to the war of 1860. As will be shown in this chapter, different regions of Lebanon were affected to varying degrees by cleansing during the Civil War. Alongside those in eastern Beirut and the Shūf, the population was also displaced in the South (see section 3.6) but less affected in the Beqaa valley (Biqāʿ) and the North. Another factor that severely disrupted religious coexistence was the Israeli occupation of the southern part of the country from the late 1970s until 2000. During this time, the (Christian) Lebanese Forces killed another, competing Maronite leader, Tony Frangié, who had aligned himself with Syria. However, throughout the Civil War, there were examples of local resistance to this sectarian logic.476

In 1989, the Taef Agreement finally put an end to the Civil War. It maintained the confessional system and the Christian Maronite hold over the state, albeit decreasing the power of the president. In addition, it ordered the disarmament of all militias except for Hezbollah (Knudsen; Kerr 2012, 27), which was considered part of the “national resistance” against the Israeli occupation in the South. The subsequent period until 2000 was known as a period of “frustration” for the Christians (Fleyfel 2013, 55).

Increasing Polarization

The introduction of UN Resolution 1559 in September 2004 which demanded the disarmament of all militias477 together with the assassination of Prime Minister Rafīq al-Ḥarīrī on 14 February 2005 both reshuffled and deeply polarised the Lebanese political landscape. The withdrawal of Syria after twenty-nine years of occupation compelled Hezbollah to join the government of Fu‘ād al-Sinyūra in order to preserve its interests (Knudsen; Kerr 2012, 6). The war against Israel in July 2006 caused the death of thousands of civilians and displaced almost one million people (Mikdashi 2011) but temporarily lessened this polarization. Yet Hezbollah

476 For instance, the mainly Shia quarter of Nāb’a in Eastern Beirut was encircled by Christian militias, except for its northern part next to the Armenian quarter. The Armenian forces remained neutral and continued to supply the Shia quarter with food, medicine and arms (Sankari 2005, 158-159).
477 UN Resolution 1559, dated 2 September 2004, demanded the retrieval of all foreign armies from Lebanon and the de-militarization of all militias (including Hezbollah). It introduced another destabilising factor (Knudsen; Kerr 2012, 10).
seemed invincible and was at the climax of its national and regional popularity. In May 2008, following a decision by the government to uproot Hezbollah’s secret communication networks, the latter deployed in Beirut (Knudsen; Kerr 2012, 7). A small-scale civil war took place between the pro-Hezbollah alliance and its political contenders, killing over one hundred people in Beirut and the mountains (Mikdashi 2011).

In the aftermath of the assassination of Rafīq al-Ḥarīrī, the March 14 Alliance and the March 8 Alliance emerged with competing strategic outlooks and alliances. The more Western-orientated, pro-Saudi, and increasingly anti-Hezbollah March 14 Alliance is made up of the al-Ḥarīrī family’s Future Movement, the Christian Lebanese Forces, the Christian ḥizb al-katāʾib al-lubnāniyya, and the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya. Following his release from prison Samīr Jaʿja’, the leader of the Lebanese Forces and former warlord, became one of the main figures in the March 14 Alliance (Fleyfel 2013, 67). The March 8 Alliance comprises Hezbollah, the Shia Amal Movement, the Christian Free Patriotic Movement, the Christian Marada Movement, the cross-sectarian Syrian Social National Party, and smaller Alawi and Druze parties. What unites this very heterogeneous party is an anti-Israeli, pro-Syrian, and pro-Iranian outlook. In addition, the Druze leader Walīd Junbalāṭ has been known for his alliance switching.

In the mid-2000s, the Future Movement began to display a growing anti-Hezbollah stance. It increasingly questioned Hezbollah’s legitimacy to bear arms, although the Future Movement had previously considered them part of the national defense (Knudsen; Kerr 2012, 8). In addition, Rafīq al-Ḥarīrī had previously established his monopoly over the political and religious representation of the Sunni community but this monopoly was increasingly questioned (see Sections 3.3.1; 3.5.1) and when his son, Saʿd al-Ḥarīrī, left Lebanon following the collapse of his government in 2011, the community faced a leadership gap. This crisis is very clear in the context of “The Innocence of Muslims.”

In 2011 (until 2014) a new government was installed under the leadership of Najīb Mīqāṭī. The latter became prime minister with the support of Hezbollah, but he had significant autonomy (Knudsen; Kerr 2012, 141). The March 8 Alliance detained two thirds of the portfolio in the government. Yet it had to rely on its partnership with Walīd Junbalāṭ, the Druze leader of the Socialist Progressive party.
The Syrian War

By 2012, the war in Syria was already having an effect on Lebanon. Several political forces were heavily involved in the conflict, either on the side of the Syrian regime or on the side of the opposition. The Syrian opposition was supported by the Future Movement\(^\text{478}\) and several Salafi leaders in Lebanon, who provided it with food, weapon supplies, and medical aid.\(^\text{479}\) In addition, weapons were shipped to Syria via Lebanon.\(^\text{480}\) Furthermore, several areas in Lebanon served as areas for the rebels in Syria to retreat to: the central Beqaa around Barr Ilyās and ‘Arsāl Ersal in al-Biqā’ valley.\(^\text{481}\) Another hint of that overlap was provided by violent clashes in February 2012 between the two neighbourhoods of Tripoli, which saw the mainly Sunni inhabited neighbourhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh (Bāb al-Tabānna) pitted against the mainly Alawī dominated neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen (Jabal Muḥsin).\(^\text{482}\) Both areas are very poor. However, these violent clashes were not only a consequence of the war in Syria; they also reflected wounds dating back to the Lebanese Civil War (ibid). In the context of “The Innocence of Muslims,” Hezbollah’s rivals denounced the party for its involvement in the war, an accusation it consistently denied or silenced. Hezbollah’s siding with the Syrian regime finally became evident during the battle of al-Qusayr in May 2013.\(^\text{483}\)

3.1 The Competition for the Defence of Islam

This chapter will start by looking at the various levels of mobilization in Lebanese Muslim communities (the Christian-Muslim reactions will be analysed in another section below). It will show the sharp contrast in the mobilization between the Sunni forces on the one hand and Hezbollah and the Amal Movement on the other hand. Section 3.1.3 will show that the protests in Palestinian refugee camps constituted an important part of the (Sunni) mobilization against “The Innocence of Muslims.” Interestingly, however, the Palestinian camps did not mobilise at all for the Hezbollah/Amal series of protests (see Section 3.1.2). In

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\(^\text{481}\) Al-Akhbar English. 9 October 2012. A Shadow State in Lebanon for the Syrian Opposition.


contrast, the aspiring Sunni Islamist leader Ahmad al-Asîr did turn to young Palestinians as part of his protest (Section 3.5.1). Both this section and Section 3.5.1 on Islamist Actors and Organizations show the level of Islamic mobilization against “The Innocence of Muslims.”

3.1.1 Tripoli: An Abandoned City

During the Civil War, the Christians living in Tripoli left and the city was cut off from the rest of the country (Rougier 2001). Besides important Sunni and Alawi communities, the city also comprised Greek Catholic Melkite and Maronite communities (Pall 2013, 31). After the Civil War, the city continued to face many problems. It is, for instance, divided into a western part, where the middle class lives, and a poorer eastern part, where the two Sunni and Alawi neighbourhoods of Bāb al-Tabānna and Jabal Muḥsin are located (Rougier 2011, 11). The Sunni community’s official Islamic institution, the dār al-fatwā, faces a serious lack of authority and power there, concerning in a city as strongly Sunni populated as Tripoli. For instance, it controls only forty of the city’s approximately 110 mosques (Pall 2013, 32). As a result, marginal Islamist and Salafi movements have tended to fill this gap, such as purist and ḥarakī Salafi streams, al-Aḥbāsh, originally from Ethiopia, al-jamā’a al-islāmiyya, and Tablighi Jamaat (Tablīgh-i Jamā’at), originally from South Asia (Pall 2013, 31). In recent years, the Salafists have increasingly come to consider themselves the vanguard against the ‘Shia plot’ and ‘imported Khomeinism’ (Pall 2013, 42). Purist Salafism promotes a quietist attitude and obedience to the ruler, whereas ḥarakī Salafism promotes political activism (Pall 2013, 11).

Seemingly in reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims,” violent reactions took place on Friday 14 September 2012 in Tripoli. A branch of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and Hardees were attacked and burnt, while pictures of Benedict XVI, who was arriving that same day in Lebanon, were reportedly also burnt.484 KFC had already been attacked in 2003 during the Iraq war.485 In addition, al-Safîr reported that there were attempts to storm the Serail, the seat of government in the city (ibid). The exact background to these events is unclear. Yet it became a powerful means of pressure used by the March 8 Alliance, especially by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement.

The previous day, on September 13, several hundred youths protested in Tripoli, the protest was reportedly primarily directed against ‘worldwide Zionism, Israel and the United

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Following Friday prayers, the Hizb ut-Tahrir (ḥizb al-tahrīr) and other organizations continued to protest outside the mosques, while, according to the media, Islamist, Salafi and other organizations did not participate. On 20 September 2012 shaykh Nabīl Raḥīm issued a public statement regarding the events. Nabīl Raḥīm is a leader of the Fatah al-Islam group (fath al-islām) and was long accused of being a member of Al-Qaida. He was born in 1971 and first joined the al-Aḥbāsh movement, before reportedly co-founding Fatah al-Islam (ibid). In al-Nashra’s article, Nabīl Raḥīm denied any connection between the Islamist movement and the violence which took place. Instead, he reported that the “shuyūkh” had intended to stay in the mosques on that Friday, but that some three hundred young men with no connection to the ‘Islamic streams and no connections to the prominent figures of shuyūkh, ‘ulumāʾ and the preachers’ left the mosque. He concluded that these riots only ‘benefit the plan of Asad’ to enter Tripoli militarily. Similarly, the Hizb ut-Tahrir denied its youth’s involvement in the clashes.

As a result, the targets of these violent clashes – KFC, Hardees, the Serail, and reportedly pictures of Pope Benedict XVI – showed that the anger went beyond outrage over the video, and seemed to be directed at the United States, the West, and the government. The reported targeting of Benedict XVI can be viewed either as the pope serving as an ersatz symbol of the West or as general anger towards Christians. These riots put tremendous pressure not only on the Salafi stream in Tripoli but also on the Future Movement and the March 14 Alliance in general. Thus, the peaceful and highly mobilized protests organized by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement can be viewed in sharp contrast to the violent “events of Tripoli” and thus as a means of putting pressure on the March 14 Alliance. As a result, the newspaper al-Safir questioned the positions of both the Future Movement and al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya: ‘Why did the neither “Future Movement,” “al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya” nor any of the organized Salafi streams take the initiative and call for protests?’

Note the quotation marks used to designate the organizations. Al-Safir leans more towards the March 8 Alliance. Al-Nahār newspaper makes use of similar quotation marks when mentioning Hezbollah.
Aḥmad al-Asīr did mention the attack on a branch of KFC in Nabatieh, a Hezbollah/Amal stronghold in southern Lebanon. A firebomb was thrown at the KFC restaurant in Nabatieh on 19 September 2012. Yet this article did not mention whether this firebomb had any connection to “The Innocence of Muslims.” The protest by Aḥmad al-Asīr in Beirut on 21 September 2012 was an attempt to break the monopoly Hezbollah and the Amal Movement had on peaceful and “civilized” protests and on the defence of Islam (see Section 3.5.1.1).

On 19 September 2012, professional associations, administrative officials, and representatives of several other institutions gathered together in Tripoli’s dār al-fatwā together with the muftī of Tripoli, Mālik al-Shiʿār. Besides condemning “The Innocence of Muslims,” the gathering also discussed several issues relating to the city. To some extent though, the condemnation of the video also represented a condemnation of the role of the media; ‘harshly condemned the film offending the right (ḥaqq) of Islam that was lately conveyed by the media’ and produced one year ago. It referred to the law criminalizing anti-Semitism and the denial of the Holocaust, stating that the pretence of freedom of speech was not acceptable in the case of this video. The statement asserted that the video only benefited ‘Zionist-American thought.’ The participants regarded the video as the cause for a new wave of violence in the city. Thus, the final statement made by this broad gathering was mostly concerned with the current situation in Tripoli; the economic situation and especially the violence, in particular that displayed against the ‘noble Alawi community’ (see Section 3.3.1.4). It stated that “sectarian violence” was ‘something Tripoli has not known in its history.’ Yet it asserted that the burning of the KFC and the Hardees was the act of ‘people under a certain security cover.’ In particular, the statement is also a criticism directed at the media, for its role in tarnishing Tripoli’s image, and against the city’s political leadership. The gathering states that it took place at such a late date because it wanted to give the ‘Tripoli politicians, ministers, and MPs the opportunity to carry out their duty and condemn this sinful act and remove its traces [?].’ The statement ended with an appeal: ‘In all its diversity, Tripoli insists that it is not outside the state. It is upon the state in all its devices to embrace this national, believing, and patient city.’

Thus, the gathering was an expression of a deep feeling of having being politically and economically abandoned, falling back on what seemed to be the last remaining leader, the muftī of Tripoli, a representative of a highly criticized and weak institution.

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3.1.2 Hezbollah: Leading the Resistance

Overall, Hezbollah, especially its secretary general, Ėhasan Naṣr Allāh, framed “The Innocence of Muslims” in the context of sectarian strife between Christians and Muslims in the region and thus saw it as requiring a joint reaction and counter-response. Although the video was understood primarily as an offense targeting Islam, speeches by Ėhasan Naṣr Allāh and the way the Hezbollah’s protests in Lebanon unfolded all suggest that Christians were understood to be part of this struggle, too. Before analysing Hezbollah’s reactions, we will first examine the history of this organization, particularly its relationship to Christians.

Since its establishment, Hezbollah has oscillated between an Islamist, modern Iranian Shia outlook and a Lebanese national outlook. According to its vice secretary general, Na‘îm Qāsim, the Israeli occupation of Lebanon was the main ‘impetus’ for its formation but not its ‘raison d’être’ (Saad-Ghorayeb 2012). Amal Saad-Ghorayeb quotes Na‘îm Qāsim who recalls that a delegation from Hezbollah’s forerunner visited imām Rūḥ Allāh Khomeinī to seek his benediction for the establishment of such an organization (ibid). According to several members of the Revolutionary Guard interviewed by the BBC, however, it was Khomeinī who sent the Revolutionary Guard to Lebanon to train and arm a group against the Israeli occupation. Since then, Hezbollah has continued to identify with the velāyat-e faqīh, the official doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and recognized the religious reference (marja’) of ‘Alī Khāmeneʾī in 1995, unlike other leading Shia figures in Lebanon (Mervin 2008, 83). At the same time, Hezbollah announced in the 2000s that it was autonomous and financially independent (ibid). In addition, its rhetoric has changed. In 1992, the movement defined itself as a ‘jihadi movement’ (Noe 2007, 57). Since then, Hezbollah has increasingly identified with Lebanon and its pluralism. In 2000, following the withdrawal of the Israeli army from South Lebanon, Ėhasan Naṣr Allāh stated in his “victory speech;” ‘It fought for Lebanese territory, it defended Lebanese citizens and confronted an enemy behaving aggressively against the Lebanese people’ (Noe 2007, 69). Two years earlier, Naṣr Allāh had asserted: ‘We are a non-sectarian Islamic party, and we are a Lebanese party that is not isolated within the borders of this country’ (Noe 2007, 183). In 2009 Hezbollah issued a new manifesto in which it reduced its Islamist rhetoric and emphasized the dangers of “US hegemony” (El-Husseini 2012, 73). In this regard, the liberation of southern Lebanon and the absence of any acts of revenge against Christians (see

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Section 3.1.2.2) increased Hezbollah’s popularity in Lebanon. In particular, its secretary general, Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh, has come to embody the party and is considered the engineer of the Israeli military failures of 1993 and 1996 (Mervin 2008, 295). In addition, he is one of the two wakīl, agents, of Khāmeneʿī in Lebanon.

Besides being deeply rooted in a modern, anti-colonial, politicised form of Twelver Shia, Hezbollah has shown much pragmatism and struck alliances with Syria, the Amal Movement, and Christian parties. The relations between Hezbollah and the Syrian regime experienced tensions between 1982 and 1993, and a strategic understanding was reached in 2000 (Mervin 2008, 94). With the outbreak of the war in Syria, however, Hezbollah became heavily involved in the conflict and has supported the regime. Similarly, prior to 2005, the Amal movement was a rival of Hezbollah, but since then, Nabih Berri, the leader of the Amal Movement, has sometimes expressed views coinciding with the positions of Hezbollah (Mervin 2008, 103). In addition, Hezbollah has struck an alliance with the former anti-Syrian and mainly Christian Free Patriotic Movement. This alliance was sealed with a document of mutual understanding (wathīqat al-tafāhum) that was solemnly made public in a room of the church Mar Mikhail in Haret Hreik (Mervin 2008, 295), a former Christian majority, but now and now heavily Shia, neighbourhood in Beirut.

One of Hezbollah’s greatest successes is perhaps the growing assertion and self-confidence of a former weak and marginalised Shia Lebanese community, the “déshérités,” which was previously embodied by the Amal Movement. As Sabrina Mervin puts it:

il change ces éternels perdants de l’histoire en vainqueurs et, avec lui, il ne s’agit plus d’une victoire spirituelle ou symbolique (ma´nawī), mais d’une victoire réelle (haqīqī), par les armes, remportée par le Hezbollah (en 2000 et en 2006) grâce à l’endurance de ses partisans (Mervin 2012, 343). Furthermore, Hezbollah has succeeded in connecting two different types of Shia communities; those of the Beqaa valley organized in tribes, and those of the Jabal ʿĀmil, more scholarly (Mervin 2008, 17).

Hezbollah’s relations with Christians demonstrate very vividly how “the Christians” have become important political assets in post-civil war Lebanon. Besides building electoral alliances, having Christian political allies and Christian religious connections as well as expressing support for the Christian presence in the Middle East all serve to increase a group’s political and ideological credibility. In the case of Hezbollah, the Christian asset plays an additional role in the purported cultural and anti-colonial fight against the West and Israel; ‘The Jews have long hoped for a war that pits a Jewish-Christian alliance against Muslims,’ stated
Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh during the Iraq war in 2003 (Noe 2007, 286). Hezbollah’s strategy is multifaceted. Firstly, it has concluded high-ranking political alliances with Michel Aoun (Mishāl A’wn), leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, and with the Maronite party, Marada. Similarly, Hezbollah has cultivated connections with the churches, even with smaller churches. For instance, for Christmas 2012, it sent a delegation to the Chaldean bishop of Lebanon.495 Thirdly, the visibility of these gestures is very important. This was already powerfully displayed by Mūsā al-Ṣadr when he preached in a church under Christ on the cross (Mervin 2012, 336). For instance, when Benedict XVI arrived in Lebanon in September 2012, Hezbollah sent a delegation of young scouts, and it also sent a high-ranking delegation to the mass held by Benedict XVI in downtown Beirut on Sunday 16 September 2012.496 Similarly, MP Nawāf al-Mūsawī, a member of the Coalition of Resistance led by Hezbollah, stated: ‘We are side by side with the Christians in the preservation of their roots in this East’ (ibid). To what extent these reactions are sincere or merely symbolic will be analysed in the context of the reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.”497

3.1.2.1 Hezbollah’s Official Reactions

Hezbollah’s reactions are divided into two sections; the declarations and the protests staged in cooperation with the Amal Movement in several Lebanese cities. The category “declarations” subsumes four declarations; one general declaration published on 13 September 2012 in al-Nahār, the declaration by MP Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī, member of the Bloc “Loyalty to the Resistance”; the declaration by MP Nawār al-Sāḥilī as well as the speech by Hezbollah’s secretary general, Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh on 17 September 2012 which initiated a series of protests throughout the country. In addition, the minister of agriculture, Ḥusayn al-Hājī al-Ḥasan, a member of Hezbollah, also reacted and promoted Lebanon as a model (see section 3.4).

On 13 September 2012, al-Nahār published a comment by Hezbollah whose exact context is unclear. The newspaper wrote “‘Hezbollah’ views”498 the video as a ‘suspicious (piece of) work,’ an ‘immoral [piece of] work,’ ‘denouncing […] the person of the

497 However, the Shia community is much diverse than the monopolisation by Hezbollah would suggest. Over the last decades, a number of figures emerged, who managed to reach claim beyond Lebanon. For instance, Muhammad Husain Fadl Allah (1935-2010), who used to be Hezbollah’s spiritual leader, later turned to a moderate, modernising Islam that reflected the emergence of a Shia middle class. In contrast, the long term president of the Higher Islamic Shia Council (about this council, see Section 3.3.1.2), Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din (1936-2001) reassessed his ideas about the velāyat-e faqīh and promoted a civil state, where religion would be separated from politics, but not from personal matters (see Mervin 2012).
498 Note the quotation marks al-Nahār uses here when referring to Hezbollah.
Messenger.\footnote{Al-Nahar. 13 September 2012. جزء “اللهمّ” الفيلم عن الرسول يهدف إلى الفتنة و الفريق العربي للحوار يدعو لتجاهله.”. Number 24847. Year 80. Page 27.} With regard to its background, the organization mentioned ‘extremist Egyptian Copts and Jewish figures’ as well as ‘the Zionist-American oath’ seeking to ignite the ‘fire of hatred,’ especially between Muslims and Copts in Egypt. Furthermore, Hezbollah reportedly asserted that this video was not an isolated act, as was often stated, but it ‘reflects the real position of the Zionist-American oath.’ Thus the organization did concede a Coptic involvement and referred to Western media reports concerning a “Sam Bacile,” but actual responsibility for the video is ascribed to the eternal enemy: the “Zionist-American alliance.”

On September 14, Lebanon Files quoted MP Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī who condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” saying, ‘The film offending Islam is an attack on the prophets and on all of us.’\footnote{Lebanon Files. 14 September. حسن الموسي ندد بالفيلم المسيء إلى الإسلام Doi: http://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/437729 (retrieved May 17, 2016).} Interestingly, he referred to Hezbollah’s official reaction as mentioned above, when he underlined that ‘the Copts are good people and so is the pope of the Copts,’ as if he were defending the Copts against generalizations. In addition, he criticized Obama for his double standards and quoted Rūḥ Allāh Khomeini: ‘Whatever America says or speaks, do not believe her. [America] is in a perpetual state of attack on you.’

On 20 September 2012, al-Tawḥīd quoted MP Nawār al-Sāḥili’s condemnation of the video and of the cartoons published by Charlie Hebdo.\footnote{Al-Tawhid. 20 September 2012. بالفيلم سلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وهيئات وأحزاب في لبنان يندد بالفيلم. Doi: http://www.altawhid.org/2012/09/20/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%9B%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81-%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%9B%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%88%D8%B3/ (retrieved May 17, 2016).} His criticism was two-fold. Firstly, he used an ethical approach by stating that freedom of thought and speech are not absolute but stop where the freedom of the other begins. This definition is very broad as it even encompasses ‘freedom of thought.’ Secondly, he again alluded to the idea that the video is a ‘conspiracy’ to produce sectarian strife. As a result, he envisioned a reaction based on the solidarity between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon, calling on them to unite since ‘the exposure of any prophet affects everyone.’

These three reactions show an awareness of Coptic involvement, while ascribing the actual responsibility for the video to “Zionism” and the United States. They also all presented the idea of the video as aiming to stir up “strife.”

Finally, among the most important events of the crisis of “The Innocence of Muslims” were the two speeches given by Secretary General Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh. The first was delivered
on television and the second was made during his appearance at the protest in Beirut. As will be shown below, his critics accused him of playing a key role in manufacturing this crisis in Lebanon. On 16 September 2012, just one hour after Benedict XVI had left Lebanon, Hasan Naṣr Allāh delivered a long speech on al-Manār, Hezbollah’s official channel. The video shows Naṣr Allāh speaking for roughly forty minutes and both a long analysis and an effort to explain this allegedly complex issue in an understandable way. Therefore, the speech is very structured. It starts with Naṣr Allāh stating his main thesis then moves on to “The Innocence of Muslims,” which is subsequently placed in a broader context – the series of “Zionist attacks” on Islam. Then, Naṣr Allāh elaborates his thoughts on the goals of this video before finally formulating several criticisms and outlining a procedure to counter this video.

Naṣr Allāh also uses several rhetorical devices and thus proving his skill as a charismatic leader (Mervin 2012, 343). He delivers his speech in Modern Standard Arabic but sometimes switches to colloquial Arabic to show his connection with the people. Some words are pronounced with the usual Syro-Palestinian inclusion of a schwa (“ə”) between two consonants at the end of a word, for instance shikəl instead of shikl. Once he uses the “b-” at the beginning of a verb and uses colloquial expressions like izā beddnā. In addition, he also switches between “I” and “we.” For instance, ‘I believe,’ ‘the Islamic community demands’ and ‘we don’t know.’ His use of the sentence ‘the Islamic community demands’ is an alliteration. Thus, Hasan Naṣr Allāh establishes himself as the spokesman of the Muslim community, a fact which is underlined by his reference to it in the first person plural (‘We are a community (umma)’) and third person singular (‘The great Islamic community (umma),’ ‘The Muslims are a community (umma) of 1.4 billion Muslims, the followers of the great revealed religion, the followers of the great prophet’). As Sabrina Mervin has argued, from the 1980s onwards, Hezbollah has hijacked the discourse of Islamic resistance and political Shia (Mervin 2012, 343).

Hasan Naṣr Allāh’s efforts to establish himself as the Muslims’ spokesman and leader are peculiarly evident in this speech, as he emphasizes the relevance of this video for Muslims. He starts his speech by stating that the video is more dangerous than the burning of al-Aqṣā mosque in 1969 because that led to the foundation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation; an ‘umma that remains silent’ sends ‘a dangerous message to the Israelis’ (YouTube 17 September 2012). Using this thesis, he establishes himself as being the vanguard of the Islamic

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503 YouTube. 17 September 2012a. الفيلم المسيء للرسول (ص). Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjGlC1LbZHE (retrieved May 17, 2016). The analysis of this speech is based on this source; i.e. quoted as “Youtube 17 September 2012.”
community worldwide. However, he then goes on to frame “The Innocence of Muslims” as also being relevant to Christians: ‘The defence of the Messenger of God (PBUH) is the defence of all holy things (muqaddasāt), of the al-Aqṣā mosque as well as the defence of all the prophets, of Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and ‘Īsā al-Masīḥ, of all revealed religions and of the revealed books.’ This statement establishes a common ground for Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, by applying the classical Islamic view of Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ as recognized and venerated prophets. In particular, the designation “‘Īsā al-Masīḥ” is interesting, because it shows a certain limited accommodation towards Christians and their view of Jesus Christ. This designation combines the Islamic word for “Jesus,” “‘Īsā” with the Christian idea of Jesus being the anointed, “al-masīḥ.” The complete Christian Arab designation would be “Yaṣūʿ al-Masīḥ.” Other references to Christians are made later on in the speech.

Subsequently, Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh describes the video as an “isāʾa” (“offense”) in various forms; as an adjective ‘the offending film,’ as a noun ‘this offense against Islam, the prophet of Islam, and against the Islamic community,’ as a verb anyone ‘who offends the revealed religions,’ ‘the constant aggression,’ ‘the future aggression.’ He also mentions the cartoons published in European newspapers. Before commenting on the video’s background, he explains his strategy for countering a ‘military, political, intellectual’ enemy: One has to know his goals and prevent the enemy from beginning again. As far as the background is concerned, the secretary general states: ‘We can speak of the Zionist movement,’ ‘some Jewish organizations in Israel.’ Yet he does mention the Coptic background to the video, according to ‘the media,’ ‘Egyptian Copts’ are behind it. Yet, he puts this information in the broader context of the “Zionist movement” using ‘apostate Muslims like Salman Rushdie or a Christian, as in the case of the burning of the Quran by the Christian cleric Jones.’ With regards to the reaction to the Satanic Verses, Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh praises implicitly the fatwā then issued by Khomaynī because it had the effect of stopping “offenses” for a long time. For “The Innocence of Muslims,” a ‘Coptic priest’ in the United States was reportedly used; this is probably a reference to Zakaryā Buṭrus. This leads him to discuss the several potential threats and goals connected to this video. Firstly, Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh sees the video as aiming to produce ‘strife between Muslims and Christians’ and push them into a ‘a bloody religious, sectarian conflict.’ He explains that Muslims would be expected to attack churches and Christian muqaddasāt, but thanks to ‘the great awareness both Muslims and Christians’ have, this was avoided. Secondly, Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh asserts that the video attempts to ‘distort the Islamic thought, distort the Islamic biography (al-sīra al-islāmiyya).’ Interestingly, he does not mention the content of the video at all.
The second part of the speech is dedicated to framing a broad response. One of his key demands is that the spread of the video be stopped and that a law be issued criminalizing such “offenses.” Interestingly, Naṣr Allāh does not mention the United Nations and other international organizations, but instead demands that the US Congress issue a law modelled on the law issued in 2004 by George W. Bush prohibiting Anti-Semitism all over the world. This law allegedly prohibited Anti-Semitic ‘declarations, actions, images, or cartoons, or, or, or, writing’ and ‘equates Jews with Israel and Zionism.’ In fact, the law established a separate office within the State Department that monitored Anti-Semitism worldwide but did not prosecute it.504 He begins by criticizing the rulers in the Muslim world at length for their defence of the United States in this matter and for their silence. Had this video offended ‘the kings, the princes, the presidents and the leaders in the region,’ they would reportedly have reacted differently; he calls on them ‘This is your Islam! This is your religion! This is your community!’ As a result, he addresses all Muslims in general, and in doing so, he tries to overcome the divisions between Muslims, stating that the it is not on one ‘confession (madhhab),’ or on the March 8 Alliance or the March 14 Alliance to react. He also addresses Christians: The ‘historical responsibility […] for the Islamic umma […] and, with them, even every honourable Christian [and] believer in coexistence and religious tolerance.’ Thus he ascribes a responsibility to Christians to show solidarity and, basically, to participate with Muslims in the war against “Zionism.” In this regard, he praises the condemnation of Christian key actors and leaders in Lebanon but seems to misspeak ‘especially the patriarchs of … the big patriarchs of the Christian communities in the East.’ He also mentions that the role Lebanon has to play is ‘bigger than its size and Lebanon is always bigger than its size in issues of civilization.’ Since Lebanon had the presidency of the Arab League at that time, Naṣr Allāh implores the government to use this opportunity. Furthermore, he alludes to the visit by Benedict XVI as a means of emphasizing the Lebanese “counter-model” to the “Zionist attack:” ‘On the contrary, Lebanon has presented us with a model […] of coexistence of Muslims and Christians.’ Eventually, he reminds his audience of the importance of a reaction; it is not enough to ‘protest our anger and then go home.’ Therefore, he announces a series of protests starting the following day in Beirut.

Summary of Section 3.1.2.1

In this long speech, Naṣr Allāh did not mention the content of the video but only condemned it as being an “offense.” Instead, he dwelt at length on the goals of the alleged “Zionist” enemy and on the appropriate counter-reactions. In doing so, he places himself in various competing frameworks: as the leader of a resistance movement, as an aspiring leader of the whole Islamic community, as promoter of Christian-Muslim coexistence, and as a Lebanese leader.

3.1.2.2 The Hezbollah Protests

In the context of “The Innocence of Muslims,” Hezbollah organized a series of protests in cooperation with the Amal Movement and other political forces: In Beirut on September 17, in Tyre (Ṣūr) on September 19, in Baalbek (Ba’labakk) on September 21, in Bint Jbail on September 22, and in Hermel (al-Hirmil) on 23 September 2012. These protests seemed to be important for Hezbollah, as its secretary general, Hasan Naṣr Allāh, appeared in one of them to deliver a speech, something he had not done for years. Thus, a key question arises concerning the reasons and motivations for these protests and the high level of popular and political mobilization.

Beirut, September 17

In particular, it was the protest in Beirut on 17 September 2012 which displayed Hezbollah’s powerful capability to mobilize its supporters, more so since Hasan Naṣr Allāh had officially announced this protest only one day earlier in his speech on al-Manār TV. Yet on September 19, al-Nahār revealed that the leaders of Hezbollah and Amal had agreed that there would be no protests as long as Benedict XVI was in Lebanon. Thus on September 17 – barely twenty-four hours after the pope had left the country –, a huge protest in a southern suburb of Beirut, al-Ḍāḥiyya, started at 5pm. 10,000s of followers of both Hezbollah and the Amal Movement were said to have joined the protest. According to RT, the women marched separately from the men during the protest, some of them wore scarves and some of them wore t-shirts. The protesters mostly carried the flags of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement,

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505 Al-Nahar. 19 September. يرى وقع رأسه في التظاهرات الحضارية في الظهيرة، منيرو غزيد و لم يتوقد، “و لماذا هذا الغباء؟”.
506 Al-Nahar. 18 September 2012. عدد 24852، ص 80. صفحات 1 و 12.
as well as the Lebanese flag and the official Syrian flag. In addition, al-Hayāt reported that some flags bore the picture of the Syrian President Bashshār al-Asad.

The main event in this protest was the live appearance of Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh in his first public appearance since his speech for Ashura (ʿāšūrā’) on 12 December 2011 and only his sixth public appearance since the war in 2006. In a speech that lasted roughly thirteen minutes, Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh repeated much of what he had mentioned in his longer speech on al-Manār; he demanded a prohibition of the spread of the video as well as a law criminalizing offenses against ‘all revealed religions, all prophets of God, against Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, ʻĪsā al-Masīḥ and Muḥammad bin ʻAbd Allāh’ and voiced his criticism of the silence of the rulers. Interestingly, Naṣr Allāh warned against the fatal consequences the release of the entire film by the US would have, as if this screaming crowd cheering him backed his statements. He insisted on the need to make such “offenses” impossible and this protest in Beirut was defined as the first step in a worldwide movement.

Of significant importance are the rhetoric skills Naṣr Allāh displays. He is able to electrify the audience, which then repeats some of his claims, for instance:

- Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh: Oh Messenger of God (yā rasūl allāh)!  
The audience: Oh Messenger of God!
- Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh: At your service, Messenger of God (fidāk yā rasūl allāh)!  
The audience: At your service, Messenger of God (fidāk yā rasūl allāh)!
- Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh: My soul and my blood!  
The audience: My soul and my blood!
- Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh: My father and my mother!  
The audience: My father and my mother!
- Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh: My family and my children!  
The audience: My family and my children!
- Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh: And all my wealth!  
The audience: And all my wealth!

He constantly switches between “you” when addressing the crowd and “we” when including the masses. In his speech he addresses the crowd ‘Oh brothers and sisters’ and the high-ranking participants ‘I thank the ulamā, whether Sunni or Shia, the representatives of the

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Christian leaders and of the Lebanese and national parties, and I feel grateful for our brothers, the leaders in the Amal Movement.’ This constant alternation between “we” and “you” is like a mirror that was widely used by Mūsā al-Ṣadr (Mervin 2012, 343). In addition, he makes reference to Christian-Muslim unity; ‘What has happened these days has to emphasize the great awareness Muslims and Christians have.’ In his long speech on al-Manār, the secretary general placed had himself in an inclusive, united, Islamic, Christian-Muslim framework, whereas this speech in Beirut established an exclusive Shia framework: ‘We are all Ḥusayn.’ To some extent, this speech indicates that the struggle against “The Innocence of Muslims” is a repetition of the battle of Kerbala.

Naṣr Allāh’s totally unexpected appearance and speech actually served to occlude the presence, if any, of other religious and political leaders. Since he thanked them, it can be assumed that some other actors were present, but the media did not mention any of them except Antoine Daw, the leader of the Maronite Bishopric Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue. However, the latter did not deliver a speech, instead making a declaration to al-Safir in which he repeated his condemnation of the ‘offense’ given to the ‘messenger’ and to all religions.512 He added: ‘We do not accuse the United States but they are protecting a racist and anti-Islamic movement’ and repeated his demand for a UN law criminalizing such acts (ibid).

Tyre, September 19

Barely any information could be found concerning the protest in Tyre (Ṣūr) on 19 September 2012. Al-Anwar merely reported that Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, ‘Islamic people’ as well as clerics from ‘different communities’ participated in a protest there.513 In addition, the leader of the southern region of the Amal Movement, Muḥammad Ghazāl, and the president of the executive committee of Hezbollah, shaykh Nabīl Qāwūq, both gave a speech in which they condemned the United States.

Baalbek, September 21

More is known about the protest that took place on Friday, 21 September 2012, in the city of Baalbek (Baʿlabakk), in which high-ranking actors participated such as al-sayyid Husayn al-Mūsawī, shaykh Muḥammad Yazbik and the MPs of the electoral constitution of Baalbek-Hermel: MP Ghāżi Zaʾītar, MP Kāmil al-Riḍāʾī, MP ’Alī Miqdād, MP Imīl Raḥma, MP Marwān Fāris; Ibrāhīm Amīn al-Sayyid, a high-ranking member of Hezbollah, and Bishop Samʿān ’Atāʾ.

Ghāzī Zaʿītar is a Shia MP and member of the Amal Movement, Kāmil al-Rifāʿī is a Sunni MP for the Islamic Action Front (see Section 3.5.1.5), ʿAlī Miqdād is a Sunni MP for Hezbollah, and Imīl Raḥma is a Maronite MP for the Solidarity Party. Kāmil al-Rifāʿī is a member of the al-Rifāʿī family, a powerful Sunni family from Baalbek which has allied herself with the Yāghī family (Daher 2012, 425). The old city of Baalbek is mainly Sunni (Daher 2012, 424). Marwān Fāris is an MP representing the Greek Catholic community, and is vice secretary general of the Syrian Socialist National Party as well as a professor at the Lebanese University. Samʿān Ṭāṭāʾ Allāh was elected bishop of the Maronite diocese of Baʿlabakk-Dayr al-Āḥmar in 2005. In addition, shaykh Muḥammad Yazbik is one of the two representatives (wakil) of the Iranian supreme leader ʿAlī Khāmeneʾī in Lebanon; the other is Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh (Mervin 2008, 210-211).

The media reported that Muḥammad Yazbik and Bishop Ṭāṭāʾ Allāh delivered a speech. Muḥammad Yazbik criticized the ‘American attack’ and the offending film [which] is a distortion of the pure image of Islam, the Islam of Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, Īsā and Muḥammad, the Islam of all the prophets’ that aimed at ‘planting strife (fitna) among Muslims and Christians’ (Al-Nahar 22 September 2012). Yet, he asserted that this goal had failed because ‘all believers in God are in one trench.’ The protest in Baalbek was described as a rally by all Lebanon to express ‘labayka yā rasūl allāh’ (ibid). Bishop Ṭāṭāʾ Allāh explained he was participating in this protest as the representative of his parish, so that ‘Lebanon remains a light for human civilization.’

**Bint Jbail, September 22**

The city of Bint Jbail (Bint Jubayl), and southern Lebanon in general, were particularly affected by the Civil War and the war against Israel in 2006. Although southern Lebanon is a mainly Shia area, it also comprises a high number of Sunni and various Christian communities. The latter were deported in 1983 and 1985 (Corm 1992, 164). Prior to the Israeli invasion in 1982, Israel had taken three Christian villages at the border in the turmoil of the Civil War in the 1970s and formed and trained militias; among these was the village of Rumaysh (Kassir 1994, 262). From these Christian villages, the Israeli army and the militias put pressure on Bint Jbail (Kassir 1994, 316). The Israeli invasion of Bint Jbail eventually led to a massive exodus of the population and the city was completely destroyed (Kassir 1994, 316). This area remained...
under occupation by Israel and by the Southern Lebanese army until 2000. As Israel retreated from Lebanon completely – except for the Shebaa farms (Mazāri’ Shib‘ā) still claimed by Lebanon –, the Christians in this region feared backlashes by Hezbollah. Antoine Daw asserts that not a single Christian was harmed (Mokrani 2009, 532). He also quotes Nabih Berri who stated that the South Lebanese Army was mostly Shia; 10% were Druze and Sunni, and only 25% Christians (Mokrani 2009, 532). During the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, Bint Jbail and southern Lebanon once again faced significant destruction; much of Bint Jbail was destroyed (Noe 2007, 385).

The protest in Bint Jbail on 22 September 2012 gathered lower ranking Christian clerics; Father Bāṣīl Nāṣif, the head of the Maronite monastery of the Lady of the Annunciation, Father Shukr Allāh Shūfānī, the dean of Kaslik University, section Rumaysh; and Father Maryūs Khayr Allāh, the priest of the Greek Catholic parish in ‘Ayn Ibl. These two villages, Rmeich and ‘Ayn Ibl played a peculiar role during the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, as will be shown below. In addition, MP ’Alī Bazzī of the Amal Movement and MP Nawwāf al-Mūsawī of Hezbollah gave speeches.

The participation of Christian representatives of the villages Rumaysh and ’Ayn Ibl in this protest is extremely significant, as the University of Kaslik played a leading role in formulating militant (and violent) Maronitism during the Civil War (Henley 2008, 356-357). As a result, unsurprisingly, the two MPs emphasized the unity of this area in their speeches. ’Alī Bazzī stated that this area was ‘One village in unity, faith and love, in the power and defence of the pride of Lebanon, of its dignity, and sovereignty.’ To some extent, his speech expressed a sense of expectation towards Christians to show solidarity, not only with the Muslims, but with this protest commended by ‘our leader, his Excellence al-sayyid Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh.’ Given that the day before that protest, ‘we’ were at a Christian mass the day they were defending Islam; ‘this Christian-Muslim [protest] is a united and directed reaction.’ Interestingly, this solidarity is based on a common theological foundation that encompasses Judaism and Christianity, as Muhammad is ‘the last of the prophets, his message, and the message of Mūsā, Ḥisā, of all prophets, of all imams and of all religions.’ Finally, ’Alī Bazzī directed his criticism primarily towards the United States since it had known about this video (Al-Nahar 23 September 2012). Nawwāf al-Mūsawī likewise ascribed responsibility for the video to the United States, as part of ‘American policy’ and denied it was an individual...
In a video showing the protest, the protesters shout ‘Israel, Israel enemy of the Muslims.’

Hermel, September 23

The series of protests ended in Hermel on 23 September 2012. MP Marwān Fāris and MP Nawār al-Sāḥilī of Hezbollah and Muhammad Yāghī, the Hezbollah representative for the Beqaa region, led this protest. Yet al-Nahār only mentioned the speech given by Muḥammad Yāghī who criticized the silence of ‘some kings, princes, organizations and rulers.’ Subsequently, American and Israeli flags were burnt and the crowd screamed ‘Death to America and Israel.’

Lastly, the small conference organized by members of the parliamentary “Bloc of Resistance” should also be mentioned here. The gathering was organized in Hermel by members of the Bloc, among them al-Walīd Sukriyya, and Hezbollah’s cultural representative in the Beqaa, al-sayyid Faysal Shukr. This conference can be understood as the conclusion to the series of protests because Faysal Shukr called for the continuation of these Lebanese protests on an international level, which to him offered proof of an ‘original muhammedian Islamic civilization and an Islamic-Christian partnership in the refusal of strife and exposure of the prophet.’ He strongly insisted on the “civilized” and non-violent nature of these protests; ‘the civilised protest (which) the secretary general of Hezbollah, his Excellence al-sayyid Hassan Nasr Allāh called for, in a way that colonialism and Zionism cannot not exploit […]’. Zionism is also referred to as the ‘Zionist cancer.’ The protests are also considered a present to the world about the ‘Truth of Islam’ and an opportunity to ‘return to a community (umma), free in its creed, in its culture and its politics, ruling over its land.’

Summary of Section 3.1.2

To some extent, the series of protests in Beirut, Tyr, Baalbek, Bint Jbail and Hermel can be described as joint Christian-Muslim and cross-sectarian reactions. They took place in the context of a post-civil war Lebanon, especially in the case of Bint Jbail. Yet the presence of Christian actors does seem to have been merely symbolic, as only the Bishop of Baalbek

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521 Al-Tawhid. 29 September 2012. للنبي بالاساءة تنديداً. مهرجان في الهرمل تندينا بالاساءة للنبي محمد (ص) وكلمة للنائب سكورية. Doi: http://www.altawhid.org/2012/09/29/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%9B%20-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-D9%8A/ (retrieved May 17, 2016).
delivered a speech. This shows there was a certain expectation towards Christians to show solidarity and loyalty. In addition, representatives of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement did not show the same level of religious accommodation as Hasan Naṣr Allāh. This section must be compared with the section about Christian-Muslim protests (see Section 3.6).

3.1.3 Other Muslim Protests

Besides the series of protests staged by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, there were also smaller protests, with either low-ranking leadership or none at all. These protests were mainly concentrated around the Palestinian refugee camps and in other parts of Lebanon.

The Amal Movement organized a march in the village al-Kharāyib in southern Lebanon, with the 'ulamā’ and local activists to protest against the video and the cartoons. The march criticized the silence of the Lebanese authorities and the double standards of Western societies; ‘How can this be freedom of speech [when] in France they forbid girls to enter schools wearing the veil?’ Two leading members of the Amal Movement in the region gave speeches in which they expressed their dissatisfaction with ‘worldwide Zionism.’

A significant part of the Islamic mobilization against the video took place in Palestinian refugee camps, although only in the southern part of the country. Protests took place in Ayn Helweh (‘Ayn al-Hilwa) in Sidon as well as in al-Rashīdiyya and el-Bass (al-Buṣṣ) in Tyre. ‘Ayn al-Hilwa has 35,000 inhabitants, the highest number of Palestinians in Lebanon (Rougier 2007, 2). According to Bernard Rougier, al-Rashīdiyya is completely controlled by Fatah (Rougier 2007, 18), which has cultivated connections with the actors of Iranian Islam since the 1960s (Rougier 2007, 27).

On September 14, several hundreds of Palestinians from ‘Ayn al-Hilwa refugee camp in Sidon protested; ‘Oh Obama we are all shaykh Usama,’ ‘Your most famous weapon is a Muslim,’ ‘Down with the American embassy!’ On Friday 22 2012 several marches starting in Palestinian refugee camps took place; in al-Rashīdiyya and al-Buṣṣ in Tyre and, on

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522 Al-Tawhid. 20 September 2012. سلسلة واسعة من الموافقات ل ערاد ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات و kínhيات وأحزاب في لبنان تندد بالفيلم. والرسومات المسيئة للرسول
523 Al-Nahar. 15 September 2012. جريحاً بعد حرق ال"كي. أف. سي." .. تظاهرات في عين الحلوة وطلعايا تندد بالصور المسيئة للرسول.
524 Al-Hayat. 22 September 2012. إجراءات أمنية كثيفة لحماية المؤسسات الفرنسية والأميركية والأوروبية في لبنان. غضب من بيروت وصيدا إلى بعلبك نصرة للرسول. Doi: http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2012/9/22/D8%20A7%20D9%2095%20D8%20AC%20D8%20B1%20D8%20A7%20D8%20A1%20D8%20A7%20D8%20AA%20D8%20A7%20D9%2094%20D9%2085%20D9%2086%20D9%208A%20D8%20A9-%20D9%2083%20D8%20AB%20D9%208A%20D9%2081%20D8%20A9-%20D9%2084%20D8%20AD%20D9%2085%20D8%20A7%20D9%208A%20D8%20A9-%20D8%20A7%20D9%2084%20D9%2085%20D9%2094%20D8%20B3%20D8%20B3%20D8%20A7%20D8%20AA-%20D8%20A7%20D9%2084%20D9%2081%20D8%20B1%20D9%2086%20D8%20B3%20D9%208A%20D8%20A9-%20D9%2088%20D8%20A7%20D9%2084%20D8%20A7%20D9%2094%20D9%2085%20D9%208A%20D8%20B1%20D9%2083%20D9%208A%20D8%20A9-%20D9%2088%20D8%20A7%20D9%2084%20D8%20A7%20D9%2094%20D9%2088%20D8%20B1%20D9%2088%20D8%20A8%20D9%208A%20D8%20A9-
September 18, in 'Ayn al-Ḥilwa in Sidon. The protest in al-Buṣṣ seems to have been led by two competing Palestinian forces; while Hamas led the march on the road next to the camp on Friday 22 September, Fatah, the PLO, Hezbollah and several other activists from Sidon staged a sit-in within the camp on September 18. This sit-in called for the boycott of American products, the removal of the American ambassador, and the unity of 'the Arabic, Islamic and Christian forces against the American and the Israeli' plan. 'Ayn al-Ḥilwa refugee camp joined the imams of the mosques of Sidon for Friday prayers and stated that the video was a conspiracy to 'stir up confessional tensions in the region.' It was reported that criticism was directed at the Future Movement, which reportedly welcomed the film, and at clerics in the city who had allegedly been agitating against the March 8 Alliance.

This shows that although Islamist, nay, Salafi-Jihadi forces have increasingly infiltrated Palestinian refugee camps (Rougier 2007), they were not visible during the “crisis” of “The Innocence of Muslims.” Protests in Palestinian camps were dominated by secular forces like the OLP and Fatah, and by Hamas. Interestingly, the protest in al-Buṣṣ, Tyre, was seemingly supported by Hezbollah and one of the protests of 'Ayn al-Ḥilwa was used to criticise the March 8 Alliance.

In addition, two protests took place in Beirut. On 17 September 2012, al-Tawhīd reported that the “Committee of the Youth of Aisha bint Bikkar” had staged a protest in cooperation with the shuyūkh, the imams of the mosques of Beirut and representatives of educational and charitable organizations. The various speeches that were delivered
emphasized the importance of national unity in Lebanon and the ‘holy creeds of all communities and sects (madhāhib).’ On 22 September 2012, al-Ḥayāt reported that youth organizations staged a sit-in in the mainly Sunni neighbourhood of Ras al-Nabih (Rāʾs al-Nabāʾ). 530

Furthermore, on Friday 14 September after prayers, a march took place in the village Taʿalabāyā in the Beqaa province, in the district of Zahlā. 531 The Islamic flags of the Hizb ut-Tahrīr, al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya and the Syrian revolution were all carried during this protest. Other protests took place in the village Barr Ilyās in al-Biqāʿ and in Tyre. 532

Finally, on September 24 al-Liwaʿ reported that al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya had organized a festival in Sidon under the motto “The Corrupted will fall and the Country will remain.” 533

Former Prime Minister Fuʾād al-Sinyūra, a representative of MP Bahiyā al-Ḥarīrī, as well as representatives of the muftī of Sidon, the Future Movement, the (Druze) Progressive Socialist Party, the Hizb ut-Tahrīr, the Salafī stream, the “Union of Associations for the Relief of Displaced Syrians,” the Ulema Gathering of Sidon, and the League of Ulema of Palestine all participated in this event. Al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya’s representative in the South, Bissām Ḥammūd, gave a speech in which he described the video as ‘these offenses by the American Administration, the French government or the Zionist enemy.’ Yet he also targeted the ‘fools, liars submerged in corruption and political harlotry, the followers of dark history.’

So far, these reactions, which took the form of protests, display the complete lack of mobilization by official religious and political Sunni leaders, be they the dār al-fatwā or the Future Movement.

3.2 Political Reactions

This section focuses on official reactions by political actors. These were framed not only in reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims” but also as a response to the violent reactions in Tripoli and the protests organized by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement. The section will first look at the reactions of the March 8 Alliance, then at those of the March 14 Alliance, and finally at those of other political parties and actors.
3.2.1 The March 8 Alliance

This first sub-section will analyse the reactions of the Amal Movement, the Syrian Socialist National Party, Michel Aoun, Ṭalāl Arslān, the Arab Democratic Party, and the Baath Party. The Marada Movement also participated in a joint Christian-Muslim protest (see Section 3.6.2)

The Amal Movement

The Amal Movement was established by Mūsā al-Ṣadr who had to acknowledge in 1975 that he had established this militia (Sankari 2005, 170). The organization was trained by the PLO (ibid), yet it only had a peripheral role at the beginning of the Civil War (Sankari 2005, 154). Amal was reportedly founded to attract young Shia away from leftist secular parties (Sankari 2005, 153).

The official declarations made by the Amal Movement comprise four separate reactions. The first, issued by the movement’s political office on 13 September 2012 on al-Tawḥīd, described the video as ‘the film of strife (al-fīlm al-ḥiṭnawī) [which] violates Islam and the prophet Muhammad,’ ‘the attack on the most noble prophet and on Christ the Lord (al-sayyid al-masīḥ).’534 The party mentioned reports on the video’s funding and about the Israeli-American producer; all this allegedly constituted proof that ‘Zionist-American powers’ and the United States were responsible. The video allegedly aimed to ignite the ‘fire of religious conflicts which translates the thesis of the clash of civilization’ and the ‘fire of the war on Islam and to distort the image of the prophet Muhammad.’

The second reaction was mentioned by al-Tawḥīd on September 18 and was another harsh condemnation by the Amal Movement’s political office and a demand for an international law prohibiting such blasphemy.535

The third reaction was the comment by the speaker of the parliament and leader of the movement, Nabīh Berri (Nabīh Birrī) that was published on September 19 in al-Nahār.536 He considered the video not only an offense against Muslims but also an offense against ‘Christians, Jews and all (the) prophets’ aiming to create ‘Islamic-Christian strife.’ In addition,

534 Al-Tawhīd. 13. September 2012. لبنان: سلسلة واسعة من المواقف المنددة من الأحزاب والجمعيات والشخصيات الإسلامية والمساجية والوطنية بالإساءة للنبي محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم: Doi:
http://www.altawhيد.org/2012/09/13/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%85/ (retrieved May 17, 2016).
536 Al-Nahār. 19 September.  ليتر وفصا "الثورات الحضارية" في الضاحية منصور غزود ولم يتردد "وللذا هذا الغداء الأميركى". Number 24853. Year 80. Page 5.
he expressed his satisfaction with the Christian solidarity displayed; in particular, with the Christian clerics’ participation in the Hezbollah-Amal protest and, surprisingly, with the position of the Palestinian bishop Hanna ‘Aṭā’ Allāh. On the other hand, he criticized the silence of ‘Islamic sides.’ Both this latter quotation and his insistence on the peaceful and ‘civilized’ nature of the Hezbollah/Amal protests throughout Lebanon are to be understood as means of exerting pressure on his political opponent and rivals, first and foremost on the leaders of the March 14 Alliance.

The fourth reaction was a declaration issued by MP Yāsīn Jābir, a member of the Amal Movement and of the parliamentary “Bloc (for) Development and Liberation.” In this declaration, published on September 20 on al-Tawḥīd, he described the video as ‘the film “The Innocence of Muslims”’ that offends the Messenger’ and as an offense against ‘the feelings of the Muslims and the free people (al-aḥrār) in the world.’ He connected the video to the ‘excuse of freedom of speech’ and to the ‘freedom of creed Arab and Muslim people have’ in the United States. He called on Muslims to unite against the video and on the international community to issue laws and rules that forbid such acts.

**The Syrian Socialist National Party**

The SSNP (al-ḥizb al-sūrī al-qawmī al-ijtimāʿī) was described by George Corm as the only true cross-confessional political party (Corm 2003, 230) and by Franck Mermier as a secular, anti-sectarian, and anti-Lebanese party (Mermier 2012, 187). It was founded in 1932 by the Greek Orthodox Lebanese Anṭūn Saʿāda and aims to unite Syria, Lebanon, Mandatory Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, and the Turkish Hatay province into one single Syrian state (ibid). It has mainly attracted marginalized groups from the Lebanese confessional system; the Druze, the Shia, and the Greek Orthodox (Mermier 2012, 191). On a political level the SSNP has been relatively successful though, as it won two seats in the parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2009 and has had one or two ministers in the government (Mermier 2012, 204). However, the party has been facing strong internal divisions, in particular after the outbreak of the war in Syria. According to al-Akhbār, the party maintains a kind of militia, ‘partisan security

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537 Lebanese Government. 26 November 2011. **Doi:** https://www.lp.gov.lb/ContentRecordDetails.aspx?id=6345&title=%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1 (retrieved May 17, 2016).


apparatus,’ in the neighbourhood of al-Hamra (al-Ḥamrā) in Beirut and shows little tolerance for internal dissent. The party has experienced pronounced internal divisions over its stance towards the Syrian regime and the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Syria (ibid).

The SSNP joined the series of protests organized by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement. The party’s vice secretary general, Marwān Fāris, participated in the protests in Baalbek and Hermel (see Section 3.1.2). In addition, the party issued a statement on 14 September 2012 and made another declaration on September 18. The statement displayed the usual language of anti-colonial rhetoric. The party’s secretary general, the Greek Orthodox MP As’ad Ḥardān, described the video as ‘the offense against the Messenger of God, Muhammad’, ‘this condemning offense of the Messenger Muhammad.’ Interestingly, in this statement, Muhammad is not mentioned as being relevant to the Muslims, but as the messenger of God. This idea is backed by the condemnation of the video as offending ‘the muhammedian message’ and as attacking Christianity. At the same time, the issue of the video was placed in the context of broader violence and extremism; ‘extremism in its different forms and levels, and from various sources,’ ‘extremism and its practices,’ ‘hatred, violence, murder and occupation.’ This enables the SSNP to denounce its eternal enemy: “Zionism,” since the video was produced by ‘the forces of extremism,’ by ‘the racist and settling Zionist enemy’ which cause ‘terror, murder, slaughter, destruction in our countries [underlined by the author].’ The statement insisted on this thesis; ‘It is clear that the extremism that bloodies our countries with terror, murder, slaughter, (and) destruction is met with every support by Israel and the colonising forces of the West’ in order to ‘create the violent environment between the people, infected by ethnic, sectarian (tā’īfiyyī), (and) confessional (madḥhabī) evil as a condition for the success of the plan to fragment the region and divide it into ghettos.’ According to the SSNP, a symptom of this was the disappearance of the Palestinian cause. Interestingly, the party did not once mention “Lebanon,” but only referred to ‘our countries’ and the region. Therefore, according to the SSNP, condemning this act of “extremism” was a moral and human duty. Furthermore, As’ad Ḥardān praised the visit of Benedict XVI and the role of the Roman Catholic Church in implementing the values of love and mutual respect.

In another declaration quoted in al-Safir on September 18, the SSNP repeated its belief that the video is part of an ‘American-Zionist plan to spread strife, chaos, extremism, 

fragmentation and to hit the unity of the social and civilizational woven fabric in heterogeneous societies.\textsuperscript{541}

**Michel Aoun, Free Patriotic Movement (al-tayyūr al-waṣatīn al-ḥurr)**

On 18 September 2012, al-Tawhīd reported on a very short comment made by Michel Aoun (Mīshāl Aʿwn).\textsuperscript{542} After a meeting with the members of the Bloc “Change and Reform,” led by Michel Aoun, he expressed his condemnation of the video – ‘an attack on prophets, messengers and dogmas’ – and praised the ‘positive propositions’ made by Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh.

**Ṭalāl Arslān, Democratic Lebanese Party**

Walīd Junbalāṭ’s political rival for the leadership of the Druze, Ṭalāl Arslān, briefly condemned “The Innocence of Muslims.”\textsuperscript{543} In particular, he condemned the ‘methodical attack by Zionism on Islam through the film’ and claimed ‘the Zionist attack targets two civilizations.’\textsuperscript{544} On 19 September 2012, al-Safīr published a short reaction by the Democratic Lebanese Party, (al-ḥizb al-dīmūqrāṭī al-lubnānī).\textsuperscript{545} The party saw the video’s aim as being to cause divisions ‘along sectarian lines’ and believed it to be part of an ‘Israeli project’ to ignite a ‘war of civilizations between East and West.’

**ʻAlī ʿAyd, Arab Democratic Party**

The secretary general of the predominantly Alawi party, the Arab Democratic Party (al-ḥizb al-ʿarabī al-dīmūqrāṭī), ʿAlī ʿAyd, issued a statement on 13 September 2012.\textsuperscript{546} In this statement, he described “The Innocence of Muslims” as ‘the film offending the prophet,’ ‘a condemnable, immoral act, representing an enemy for Islam and the Muslims’ that was shown in the United States. For the Alawi see section 3.3.1.4.

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\textsuperscript{543} Ṭalāl Arslān was a minister and MP several times between 1991 and 2005 (seemingly both at the same time) Who’s Who 2007-2008 Arslane, Talal, Majid Emir). He originates from the famous Arslān family whose leader he currently is.


The Baath Party

On 22 September 2012, *al-Tawḥīd* published the position of Muḥammad Shākir al-Qawwās, leader of the Baath Party (ḥizb al-baʿth) in Lebanon, on the video. He considered it an ‘attack on Islamic and human history’ that demanded a ‘collected, firm, and united position from Muslims and Christians in the Arab countries (awtān) and the world.’ In addition, he criticized the position of some ‘Zionist-friendly Islamic movements’⁵⁴⁷ that had allegedly sold Muhammad out.

**Summary of Section 3.2.1**

These reactions show how heterogeneous the March 8 Alliance is. These parties share a common anti-colonial and anti-Israeli stance. None of these groups condemned the violent reactions. In addition, the reactions showed that different actors perceived this issue to have different levels of relevance; while some condemned the video in rather neutral terms, others, like the Amal Movement and the SSNP, made significant use of anti-colonial rhetoric.

**3.2.2 The March 14 Alliance**

This section will now analyze the declarations made by the March 14 Alliance, the Future Movement, the Lebanese Forces, the Kataeb, *al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya*, and the Free Lebanese Party. Several representatives of this alliance also participated in a gathering staged by *al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya* in Sidon (Section 3.1.3) and in a Christian-Muslim conference in ‘Akkār (3.6.4)

**March 14 Alliance**

The March 14 Alliance released two official reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” In an initial statement issued by the secretariat of the alliance and quoted on *al-Liwāʾ* on 14 September 2012, the movement demanded the United States prosecute the makers of the video.⁵⁴⁸ Yet it also harshly condemned the violent reactions to the video, especially the murder of the US ambassador to Libya, stating that Islam had been ‘offended’ again (by this). It also demanded that the authorities in Libya and Egypt prosecute those responsible for these violent clashes. A week later, following its weekly meeting, the March 14 Alliance again condemned the video as an ‘offense against Muslims.’⁵⁴⁹ In particular, it criticized the video for its timing and its potential for tarnishing the image of the Arab Spring. However, the alliance also accused

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⁵⁴⁷بعض الحركات الإسلامية المتصهينة.
Hezbollah of diverting attention from the ‘crimes of the Syrian regime’ by staging this series of protests. The statement added that the presence of Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon violates the country’s sovereignty.

**The Future Movement**

Several members of the Future Movement reacted officially to “The Innocence of Muslims;” alongside the Future Movement, there were also reactions by Fu’ād al-Sinyūra, Sa’d al-Ḥarīrī, MP ‘Imār al-Ḥūrī, member of the Future Bloc, and Niqāl Ṭa’ma. To some extent, the Future Movement was in a precarious situation at that time, as its leader, Sa’d al-Ḥarīrī had left Lebanon following the collapse of his government. According to al-Akhbār, he was facing serious financial problems which raised questions about his credentials as the leader of his (Sunni) community. In the meantime, the vacuum was filled to some extent by Fu’ād al-Sinyūra (Fouad Siniora), who was minister of finance from 2000 to 2004 under the late Rafīq al-Ḥarīrī.

On September 13, Fu’ād al-Sinyūra led a delegation of the Future Movement to visit Patriarch Bishār Butrus al-Rā’ī. During this visit, al-Sinyūra mentioned the up-coming visit of Benedict XVI, the role of Lebanon as a model for the region, and the thwarted attack against the patriarch during his visit to ‘Akkār. In addition, he mentioned the video as a ‘suspicious film’ and as a ‘trap’ with a vague background (‘if the maker of this film is of a given nationality’). In particular, he criticized the timing of this film allegedly aiming to provoke Muslims and weaken the Arab Spring and the democratic movement. Yet he also condemned the violent reactions to it.

Similarly, Sa’d al-Ḥarīrī criticized the video for its timing, ‘when we are working on building up dialogue, mutual understanding and mutual respect’ and the threat it posed to the Arab Spring. In addition, he viewed the video as aiming to ‘plant strife (fitna) between the people and the religions’ and noted the ‘offense’ it constitutes for Islam. Despite this, Sa’d al-Ḥarīrī likewise criticized the violent reactions to it.

MP ‘Imād al-Ḥūrī, member of the Future Bloc, accused Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh of misusing the video to serve his own political interests and also accused Hezbollah’s supporters of having

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screamed ‘There is no God but Bashshār’ during the protests, probably in an attempt to polemicize Hezbollah supporters.

In comparison, the Future Movement reacted relatively late. On September 19, al-Safir reported the movement’s call on the Arab League and international organizations to issue a law forbidding an ‘attack on religion and prophets’ and its condemnation of the violent reactions. On September 18, following its weekly meeting, it issued a statement in which several subjects were mentioned. The statement declared that the Apostolic Exhortation issued by Benedict XVI during his visit supported al-Azhar’s document concerning the Arab Spring and the role of Christians in the region. The statement also condemned the video, its timing, and its alleged goal of igniting strife in the region. Yet the Future Movement also condemned the violent reactions which took place in connection with “The Innocence of Muslims.”

Finally, MP Niḍāl Ṭaʿma expressed his position on “The Innocence of Muslims” at a students’ graduation ceremony. In his speech, which was probably given at the school he founded, Niḍāl Ṭaʿma condemned the video as ‘this offense against the right and the freedom of creed’ and ‘the offending film’ and ‘the crime against the right (ḥaqq) of humanity.’ Interestingly, he added that the film primarily offended Christianity before it offended Islam, because ‘if jealousy did not make us [attack] the sacred things of our partners in the nation, then Lebanon would not have a role and would not be a lighthouse for coexistence (al-ʿaysh al-mushtarak)’. This declaration might have been motivated by the fact that he was addressing students.

Al-Jamāʿa al-Islāmiyya

Al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya is a key ally of the Future Movement. It was founded in 1962 as the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Gervais 2012, 121) and since then it has shown a high level of political pragmatism and conservatism and has strived for the preservation of the interests of its community, the Sunnis (Gervais 2012 121-122). It ran in the parliamentary

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556 Niḍāl Ṭaʿma was born in 1960 and fled to Sierra Leone during the Civil War. He holds the Greek Orthodox seat for the Ṭaʿma was born in 1960 and fled to Sierra Leone during the Civil War. He holds the Greek Orthodox seat for the ʿAkkār province in parliament. In addition, he was one of the founders of the Orthodox Youth Movement in ʿAkkār and has established an Orthodox school in the region, whose director he has been since 1993. 14 March. Doi: http://www.14march.org/profile-details.php?id=MTMxMTU1 (retrieved May 17, 2016).
557 Al-Tawhid. 20 September 2012. سلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزراء وسفراء وشخصيات وشخصيات في لبنان تندد بالفيلم ورسومات المسيئة للرسول. مسلسلة واسعة من المواقف لنواب ووزاء
elections in 1972 (Gervais 2012, 121). Following the Civil War, Rafīq al-Ḥarīrī made great efforts to secure an alliance with al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya, even fuelling rumours about significant financial support (Gervais 2012, 120-121). However, this proximity to the Future Movement (and the March 14 Alliance) has led to a division within the party. The spiritual leader of the Lebanese Brotherhood, Fatḥī Yakan, has been particularly critical of this alliance; ‘adhérer au movement du 14 Mars c’est se soumettre au projet de contrôle hégémonique des États-Unis au Moyen-Orient’ (Gervais 2012, 127), and subsequently founded the Islamic Action Front, whose reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” will be mentioned in Section 3.5.1.5.

The reactions displayed by al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya comprise two official statements and two declarations by its secretary general, MP ‘Imād al-Ḥūt. In addition, al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya staged a sit-in in Sidon in late September (see Section 3.1.3).

On September 13, al-Tawḥīd published a short statement by the organization, in which it mostly condemned the video for ‘distorting the image of Islam.’ In addition, because of its timing, al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya also accused it of seeking ‘not only (to) offend Islam, its prophet and the Muslims, but also to sow strife between Muslims and non-Muslims.’ Interestingly, al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya attributed responsibility for this film to those states that allowed the video ‘under the pretence of freedoms’ because they had collaborated to a great extent in the ‘plans to trigger strife (fitna).’ Furthermore, the statement condemned the violent reactions by calling for ‘civilized and aware’ reactions.

The statement published on September 18 in al-Anwar was more elaborate when mentioning the video. “The Innocence of Muslims” was referred to as a cinematographic production, as ‘the film offending Islam,’ the ‘hateful act,’ and ‘this enemy act.’ Furthermore, the video was accused of targeting ‘Islam as a religion and the Muslims as a community (umma),’ ‘offending the prophet of mercy, Muhammad’ and as ‘distorting the image of Islam and Muslims.’ In addition, the statement repeated two ideas from the previous statement; the idea that the video was aiming to cause sectarian strife and ‘fragmentation of the region on a sectarian basis,’ as well as the condemnation of the violence, again calling on Muslims to react, but using ‘civilized and aware’ means. Furthermore, it demanded the prosecution of the producers. Al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya also announced that it had covered its vans in Sidon with

black banners stating ‘ilā rasūl allāh’ and ‘if they knew you, they would love you [Muhammad].

In an initial reaction reported on September 15 in L’Orient Le Jour, general secretary ʿImād al-Ḥūt refuted the pretence of freedom of speech in the production of the video.⁵⁶¹ He appeared to acknowledge a Coptic background, as he stated ‘What has been produced does not necessarily reflect the opinion of Christians in the East.’ Thus he also seemed to suggest that some Christians might agree with what was produced. In his conversation with “Radio of the East,” reported on September 18 in al-Anwar, ʿImād al-Ḥūt talked about several subjects, and, in connection to the video, he appeared to react to criticism against the al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya.⁵⁶² He explained that al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya did not organize protests because the organization had already issued a statement condemning the video, and such an action was better than the ‘violence by groups who do not belong to Islam.’ He maintained that Arab and Islamic governments needed to pressure the UN to issue a statement. In addition, he made what could be a possible criticism of Hezbollah, as he stated that it was necessary to react to “The Innocence of Muslims” but anger at the ‘bloodshed in Syria is more of a duty.’ More precisely he questioned Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh’s ability to organize peaceful protests. As well as the video, ʿImād al-Ḥūt also discussed the presence of Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon and the visit of Benedict XVI, whom he considered to have issued a call to Christians to join the Arab Spring.

Samīr Jaʿja’, Lebanese Forces

Samīr Jaʿja’ (Samir Geagea) issued two reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.”

He was born into a poor family (Aubin-Boltanski 2012, 58) and joined the Lebanese Forces that were founded in 1976 by Bashir Gemayel. Although Samīr Jaʿja’ was raised in the neighborhood Ain el-Remanneh in Beirut, he is known as “the man of Bcharré,” a Maronite village in Mount Lebanon (Aubin-Boltanski 2012, 60). During the civil war, he was involved in several crimes, among them the murder of Tony Frangié’s family (although his actual responsibility is not clear). Subsequently, he was imprisoned from 1994 to 2005 and during this time, he acquired the image of a “martyr,” as he was one of the few warlords who served his sentence (Aubin-Boltanski 2012, 58). Since then, he has tried to establish himself as the temporal leader of the Christians (Aubin-Boltanski 2012, 70).

On September 14, al-Anwar reported on Samir Ja’ja’’s statement on the necessity of respecting religion and “muqaddasāt” and his condemnation of the ‘offense of a cinematographic movie offending the messenger of Islam.’ Yet, in the name of the Lebanese Forces, he also condemned the violent reactions to the film, in particular the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi. He reported that he had called the US ambassador to Lebanon to convey his condolences.

His reaction as reported on September 18 in L’Orient Le Jour differed greatly. Samir Ja’ja’ repeated his condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” saying; ‘I harshly condemn this film, not only as a Lebanese who has to defend the interests of the second half of the nation, but also absolutely.’ More important, he harshly criticized the way Hezbollah dealt with the video; ‘what bothered me was the way some insignificant people behind this futile film were able to provoke the mobilization of some groups of Muslims which will confirm the negative image conveyed by this film.’ More precisely, he accused Hasan Naṣr Allāh of having misused this film for political goals.

Kataeb (ḥizb al-katāʾib al-lubnāniyya)

Former president of the republic, Amin Gemayel (Amīn al-Jumayyil) and his nephew, Nadim Gemayel (Naḍīm al-Jumayyil) also reacted officially to “The Innocence of Muslims.”

During a press conference, probably on 17 September or 18 September 2012, Amīn al-Jumayyil alluded to diverse subjects such as the visit of Benedict XVI, Hezbollah’s protests, and election law. With regards to the pope’s visit, al-Jumayyil expressed his sorrow over the events in Tripoli during the pope’s visit. In addition, he condemned the violent reactions to the video, asking ‘We try to understand Islamic feelings, [but] we question: Is this the right way to express our protest? Does this serve the Quran and Islamic symbols? No. On the contrary.’ Interestingly, in this quotation he still used “we” despite evoking the violent Muslim reactions. Furthermore, he questioned Hezbollah’s ability to guarantee peaceful protests; ‘We also ask: Against whom is Naṣr Allāh protesting?’ and ‘we don’t know where this mobilization can possibly lead.’

In contrast, Naḍīm al-Jumayyil’s reaction was limited to a condemnation of the video, classing it as an ‘attempt to destabilize the region’ and he was also critical of the violent

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563 Al-Anwar. 14 September 2012.
During his visit with the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Beirut, Ilyās ‘Awdīh, he praised Benedict XVI’s visit, which had given ‘very much confidence to the Christians in the region.’

**National Liberal Party**

The National Liberal Party (*ḥizb al-waṭaniyyūn al-akhrār*), a rather leftist party, was founded in 1959 by former president Camille Chamoun (Kaḥmil Nimr Sham‘ūn) (Shahnahe 2005, 93), president of Lebanon from 1952 to 1958. The party maintained a militia during the Civil War but it was dissolved by the Kataeb in 1980 (Labévière 2009, 26). It used to have Shia support, but is a mainly Maronite party that joined the March 14 Alliance (Shahnahe 2005, 93).

The statement issued by this party after its weekly meeting strongly resembles the positions of other members of the March 14 Alliance. The party expressed its condemnation of the video, but it added that it was ‘deeply sorry’ for the violent reactions that ‘distort the image of Islam more than those who produced’ the video. The statement asserted that Christians and Christianity have also been ‘offended.’ Interestingly it repeated another of Samīr Ja‘ja’’s ideas relating to the responsibility of the US; ‘Neither the Americans nor the American government are responsible, and neither are the West or any religion.’ Instead, the responsibility of this video was ascribed to ‘a little extremist group.’ Another recurrent issue mentioned by the March 14 Alliance is mentioned here; the war in Syria. The Free Lebanese Party stated that the furor surrounding this video was engineered ‘to distract [attention] from the crimes of the Syrian regime.’ Finally, the statement referred to other issues that were mentioned by the March 14 Alliance; the visit by Benedict XVI (viewed as a call on Muslims and Christians to ‘work together under the principles of freedom, justice, equality, and partnership’), Hezbollah’s weapons and the presence of Iranian Revolutionary guards in Lebanon.

**Buṭrus Ḥarb**

Buṭrus Ḥarb has been an MP from 1972 to 1992, in 1996, and from 2000 on, and has also been a minister several times. His headquarters are in Tannourine in Mount Lebanon; he is a Maronite (Douayhi 2012, 483) and he is part of the March 14 Alliance. In a press

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conference on 18 September 2012, he briefly mentioned “The Innocence of Muslims.”

He considered it ‘not only an offense against the prophet and against Muslims, but also against all revealed religions, especially against the coexistence between Muslims and Christians’ and demanded the prosecution of its makers.

**Summary of Section 3.2.2**

Although the members of the March 14 Alliance are also very heterogeneous, their reactions display a lower level of heterogeneity than the March 8 Alliance. There are more common patterns: condemnation of the violence and of Hezbollah, which reportedly tried to hide its involvement in the Syrian conflict by creating a hue and cry surrounding the video. In addition, the background of the video is mentioned only vaguely and does not seem to be relevant.

### 3.2.3 Other Political Actors

This third section will describe the reactions of prominent actors such as Walīd Junbalāṭ, Īlī Firzlī, as well as former President Emile Lahoud (Imīl Laḥūd), ḥizb al-ittiḥād, ḥarakat al-nāṣirīn al-mustaqilīn, and nidāl al-lubnānī al- arabī, and also those of less famous actors such as ḥizb al-wafāq al-waṭānī, and Bahā’ al-Dīn ʻĪtānī.

**Walīd Junbalāṭ**

Walīd Junbalāṭ is an important actor in Lebanese political life. Under him, the Progressive Socialist Party became a party exclusively representing Druze interests (el-Husseini 2012, 61). During the Civil War, he maintained a militia and contributed to the ethnic cleansing of the Chouf (Rivoal 2012, 142); until 2004 he had been one of the closest allies of Syria for some time (Knudsen; Kerr 2012, 157). Then he joined the March 14 Alliance for a while.

Despite his party’s participation in the sit-in organized by al-jamā‘a al-islāmiyya (see Section 3.1.3), Walīd Junbalāṭ’s reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims” differed completely from those of the March 14 Alliance. His condemnation of the video “The Innocence of Muslims” was particularly elaborate. It was published on 14 September 2012, on the website of his party, the Progressive Socialist Party *(al-hizb al-taqadumī al-ītshirākī)*. Walīd Junbalāṭ described the video as ‘the film “The Innocence of Muslims”’ *(al-Nahar 15 September 2012).*

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2012), ‘the suspicious film,’ ‘the violation of religions and its symbols,’ ‘these suspicious plans,’ aiming to ‘intensify the feelings of hatred’ (ibid). He connected the video to Israel in various ways. Firstly, he stated: ‘It is not possible not to make Israel responsible’571 Secondly, the timing of the release during Benedict XVI’s visit caused him to reflect on Lebanon as a ‘diverse democracy in contrast to the monolithic Israel’ (ibid). In addition, he accused Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu of having consistently pressured the United States into attacking Iran and thus plunging the region into a ‘sectarian and doctrinal (madhhabī) chaos which would serve the interests of Israel’ (ibid). Thus Junbalāṭ called on the United States to issue a law criminalizing blasphemy similar to the law prohibiting Anti-Semitism (ibid). Furthermore, he condemned the violent reactions to the film and the murder of the US ambassador (al-Nahar 15 September 2012).

**İlí Firzlî, Former Second Speaker of Parliament**

Elie Ferzli (İlí Firzlî) was born in 1948 in Zahlé; he was an MP from 1991 to 2005, and deputy speaker of parliament from 1992 to 2005.572 From 2004 to 2005 he was a minister. In addition, he is a leading member of the Orthodox Gathering (see Section 3.5.2) He expressed his view on “The Innocence of Muslims” in a conversation with al-intiqād and he posted on his blog.573 As well as mentioning the ‘film named “The Innocence of Muslims,”’ he also referred to the cartoons and to Terry Jones. He considered all these acts part of a series of offenses that started a decade ago to ‘ignite the “clash of civilizations” (ḥarb al-ḥadāra).’ He placed these issues in the broader context of a clash of civilization in the interest of Israel; ‘the Zionist creature’ with Israel sitting at the head of a war. İlí Firzlî re-wrote the history of the twentieth century, starting with the Balfour Declaration that ‘planted the Zionist creature in the region.’ Now, he believed that the collapse of the Soviet Union has meant that the West was searching for a new war between ‘the East which is majority Muslim and the West which is majority Christian.’ In this context, “The Innocence of Muslims” particularly affected Christians because it aimed to ‘inflame Islamic feelings against the Christians in the region, especially the Copts in the region, in order to deepen the conflict and to destroy the Christians in the East.’ Interestingly, he called for reactions in which he placed himself side by side with Muslims; ‘we all have to be behind the Messenger and defend him by emulating his ethics.’ Thus, İlí Firzlî

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placed the video in the context of a solidarity between Muslims and Christians which rested on a common history and even a shared identity, and the film was reportedly targeting this unity.

**Emile Lahoud, ḥizb al-ittihād, ḥarakat al-nāṣirīn al-mustaqillīn, niḍāl al-lubnānī al-ʿarabī**

On or around 18 September 2012, former President Emile Lahoud (Imīl Lahūd)⁵⁷⁴ received a delegation from three parties, ḥizb al-ittihād,⁵⁷⁵ ḥarakat al-nāṣirīn al-mustaqillīn⁵⁷⁶ and niḍāl al-lubnānī al-ʿarabī, which is led by former MP Fayṣal al-Dāwūd.⁵⁷⁷ As a result, the reactions given by of these four actors will be analysed together.

On September 13, al-Tawḥīd quoted the declaration made by Fayṣal al-Dāwūd in which he condemned the repetition of ‘offenses.’⁵⁷⁸ Yet he underlined the impossibility of distorting the image of Islam, as ‘this tolerant Islamic message, a producer of films cannot distort it.’ In addition, he connected the video to “Zionism” which ‘produces the clash of civilizations.’

Similarly, in the same article, al-Tawḥīd also reported ḥizb al-ittihād’s condemnation of the video. The video is described as an “offense” and immediately connected to “Zionism.” The party considered the video a product of ‘American and Zionist hate’ and part of the US strategy to ‘protect the Zionist creature and support it in its dreams.’ Ḥizb al-ittihād accuses the video of aiming to stir up “sectarian strife (fitna taʿiyya) and pushing Muslims and Copts into a bloody conflict to implement the plans of the New Middle East.” However, the party stated that this alleged plan had failed, since Muslims and Christians had protested together against the video and praised the position taken by the ‘Coptic church.’ Interestingly, the declaration added a description of Muhammad, entrusted by God to ‘carry the Islamic banner for the world, Islam, and Muslims who call for the religion of right.’

Finally, al-Tawḥīd’ s September 13 article also mentioned the comment by the leader of ḥarakat al-nāṣirīn al-mustaqillīn, Muṣṭafā Ḥamdān, on the Arab Spring. He asserted that the

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⁵⁷⁴ Imīl Lahūd was born in the Metn district (qadāʾ al-Matn) of Mount Lebanon and was a cadet officer in the navy who went on to rebuild the Lebanese army and re-introduced mandatory service (el-Husseini 2012, 91) until 2006. When he was elected president in 1998, it was reportedly under pressure from Syria and he increasingly sent officers to Syria for training (ibid). He was president of Lebanon from 1998 to 2007.

⁵⁷⁵ Ḥizb al-ittihād can be described as a party inspired by Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir whose goals of freedom, socialism, and unity it pursues.

⁵⁷⁶ Ḥarakat al-nāṣirīn al-mustaqillīn is also called “al-murābīṭūn.”


United States had been attempting to ‘interfere and contain this movement’ since its beginning.

Following the meeting between Imīl Lahūd, ḥizb al-ittihād, ḥarakat al-nāṣirīn al-mustaqilīn, and nidāl al-lubnānī al-ʿarabī, these actors issued another reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims.” Imīl Lahūd condemned the video harshly and attributed it to Israel, the ‘old, new enemy’, because the timing only benefited the Israeli enemy who always seeks to harm the unity of Lebanon and the coexistence [...] between all its [elements].

He therefore stressed the need for unity: ‘The most important and strongest position the Lebanese and the community (umma) of Arabs can possibly take’ is ‘unity and then unity’ (ibid). Similarly, the leader of ḥizb al-ittihād, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Marrād, asserted that such ‘movies’ were not unusual for the United States, which also undertook the ‘the slaughter of the grandsons of the messenger in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, and most Islamic countries.’ Interestingly, Christians were also counted as “grandsons” of Muhammad. He considered the film to be a result of ‘Zionist control over the US Administration’ (ibid). In addition, Fayṣal al-Dāwūd, the leader of nidāl al-lubnānī al-ʿarabī, condemned the video as a ‘shame’ for the United States and the West.

He quoted Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh who allegedly referred to the video as a ‘means of explosion on an international level’, but thanks to ‘the awareness of Christians and Muslims,’ this failed (ibid).

**ḥizb al-wafāq al-waṭanī**

The president of the party ḥizb al-wafāq al-waṭanī, Bilāl Taqī al-Dīn, offered two reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” He also believes that the video produced by ‘Zionist-American circles’ sought to ‘fuel hatred and tension’ and ‘produce strife between Muslims and Christians,’ thereby ‘producing enmity between Muslims and Christians.’ In addition, he asserted that Islam and Christianity could not possibly be behind such a ‘destabilizing work that offends the freedom of religion’ (ibid). In another declaration quoted on al-Tawḥīd on

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581 Al-Safir. 19 September 2012.
582 Al-Safir. 19 September 2012.
583 Al-Nashra. 18 September 2012.
September 18, Bilāl Taqī al-Dīn harshly criticized muftī Rashīd Qabbānī’s reported passivity on “The Innocence of Muslims: ‘Where is his Excellence, the muftī of the Republic? […] Must he not call for protests in the mosques? Must he not be at the forefront of its war and in the defence of the person of the Messenger?’ In addition, he called on Muslims and Christians to react to the video and criticized the silence of Arab countries.

Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĪtānī

On 17 September 2012, former MP Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĪtānī issued a statement in which he condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” ‘the film offending Islam’ that was allegedly shown on the internet and in American cinemas. He stated that the “film” aimed to ‘create unrest in the Muslim and Arab world’ and served the ‘interests of the Israeli enemy.’

Summary of Section 3.2

All these reactions demonstrate a contrast between the March 14 Alliance and all the other political parties and actors, comprising both the March 8 Alliance and others. While the March 14 Alliance tended to criticize both the violent reactions and Hezbollah, the others placed the video in the context of enmity with Israel and used a strongly anti-colonial discourse. This section has shown how the video was used by the various political actors to exert pressure on its contenders.

3.3 The Religious Institutions

3.3.1 The Muslim Communities

This section will look at the reactions of religious institutions in Lebanon, that is to say the official Islamic institutions of the Sunni, Shia, Druze and Alawi communities (section 3.3.1), as well as at the reactions of the churches (Section 3.3.2).

3.3.1.1 The Sunni Community

Since the end of the Civil War, the Sunni community has been facing a serious crisis because it has lost its urban elite (Rougier 2004, 124). In addition, its religious leadership lacks

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585 Al-Tawhid. 18 September 2012. تواصل المواقف المنددة والغضب في المجتمع المدني والسياسي في لبنان جراء بث الفيلم المسيء للإسلام.

legitimacy (see Rougier 2004, 120) and part of its political leadership, especially the Future Movement, has tried to influence the religious institution, the dār al-fatwā, to its benefit.

The dār al-fatwā was established in 1922 under the French Mandate and the position of muftī was created in 1932 (Rougier 2004, 114-115). In 1955 a law was passed to regulate the Sunni community (ibid). The muftī names the imams, the preachers, the teachers, the muezzins, the provincial muftī, and manages the Islamic endowments (Rougier 2004, 118-119). Yet lower-ranking 'ulamā’ do not receive funding from the dār al-fatwa and Zoltan Pall notes that the positions of high-ranking 'ulamā’ often have a political dimension (Pall 2013, 31). In addition, the Future Movement has tried to increase its political hold on this religious institution. Following a reform initiated by Rafiq Hariri in 1996, the electoral base was so much reduced that the institution now lacks any popular legitimacy (Rougier 2004, 118). Under the premiership of Fu‘ād al-Sinyūra, a new law was proposed to modify the 1955 law, redefining the position of the muftī so that he is no longer the ‘religious leader of all Muslim sects’ but the ‘religious leader of Sunni Muslims.’ In addition, muftī Rashīd Qabbānī allegedly lacked charisma (Rougier 2004, 118-119) and authority (Pall 2013, 32). As a result, he faced pressure from both politicians and Sunni clerics. The competition between Rashīd Qabbānī and the political Sunni leadership, particularly the Future Movement, reached a new level with the premiership of Najīb Mīqātī (2005; 2011-2014) and Fu‘ād al-Sinyūra (2005-2008), the political leadership even questioning the authority of the muftī (Al-Akhbar 16 August 2012). From below, the non-official, marginal elements have felt compelled to take over the defence of Sunni Orthodox Islam (Gervais 2006, 63). For instance, Shaykh Māhir Ḥammūd criticized the dār al-fatwā for being an ‘annexe of the Lebanese government’ (Gervais 2012, 120). In addition, Māhir Ḥammūd was amongst a group of ‘ulamā’ that accused the muftī of corruption: ‘Does not the muftī see in religion anything but the money and the wealth he robs from the dār al-fatwā with the backing of al-Sinyūra, al-Ḥarīrī and their likes?’

In the context of “The Innocence of Muslims,” the muftī Rashīd Qabbānī delivered five reactions, each one issued in a different context; firstly, in an open letter to the Muslims; secondly, in a Friday sermon; thirdly, during the meeting between Benedict XVI and the Islamic religious leaders; fourthly, at a gathering at dār al-fatwā, and finally, in an appearance on al-Manār, Hezbollah’s channel. These numerous and diverse reactions might have been motivated

588 About Māhir Ḥammūd, see section 3.5.1.
by the violent protests in the neighbourhood of Achrafieh (al-Ahsrafîyya) in Beirut in 2006 in reaction to the so-called Danish cartoons.\textsuperscript{590} These violent reactions showed just how much the dār al-fatwā was lacking in authority and power (Gervais 2006, 57). The reaction of the mufīṭi of Tripoli, Mālik al-Shiʿār, will also be analysed here. He participated in a conference of civil society actors in Tripoli (see Section 3.1.1). Furthermore, the mufīṭi of northern Lebanon, the mufīṭi of Tyr, and a representative of Islamic Endowments participated in joint Christian-Muslim conferences (see Section 3.6).

In his letter to the Muslims published on 13 September 2012, on al-Tawḥīd, Rashīd Qabbānī described the video as ‘an American film whose title is “The Innocence of Muslims,”’ as ‘this hateful act,’ part of the repeated attacks on Islam, Muhammad and the Quran. It aimed to ‘harm the personal relations between the religions of the world’ and ‘plant strife between Muslims and Christians in the world.’\textsuperscript{591} Thus, he definitively placed the video in the context of “Western blasphemy” ‘justified by the freedom of expression,’ and mused that the United States, ‘the most powerful country in the world,’ which ‘tries to extend its influence everywhere in the world, it is not possible that they do not know or are not aware of it. As a result, he demanded counter-measures on an international level in the name of the Lebanese people. Similarly, Qabbānī demanded a national Lebanese response; ‘We repeat our call to Muslim and Christian Lebanese to be united (al-sawt al-wāḥid) in the refusal of offense […] so that Lebanon remains a message and a model of coexistence.’\textsuperscript{592}

In his sermon on Friday 14 2012, in the Muḥammad al-Amīn mosque in downtown Beirut, Rashīd Qabbānī repeated similar ideas. He questioned the possibility of the United States not being aware of this ‘film shaming and offending Islam and its prophet (PBUH).’\textsuperscript{593} This ‘call of terror’ sought, according to the mufīṭi, to anger the feelings of Muslims in order to provide an opportunity to say ‘look at those terrorist Muslims’ and to cause ‘strife between Muslims and Christians,’ especially in the context of the pope’s visit. Furthermore, the “film” is viewed as an attack on both Islam and Christianity, targeting Islam ‘today,’ and Christianity ‘tomorrow.’ In his sermon, Qabbānī addressed both the people in the mosque and Muslims and Christians in general whom he called on to unite.

\textsuperscript{590} The Danish mission and a Maronite church were attacked in February 2006 by angry protesters in the mainly Christian area of Achrafieh. Rashīd Qabbānī ascribed responsibility for these clashes to agents provocateurs. See The New York Times. 5 February 2006. Protesters in Beirut Set Danish Consulate on Fire. Doi: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/05/international/middleeast/05cnd-beirut.html?_r=0 (retrieved May 17, 2016).

\textsuperscript{591} Al-Tawḥīd. 13. September 2012.

Interestingly, in the context of the meeting between Benedict XVI and the Lebanese Islamic religious leaders on Sunday 16 September 2012, Rashīd Qabbānī did mentioned this issue, among other things, but then dwelt more precisely on its background. The video was then described as the ‘extracts of a film,’ of a man with ‘Zionist and American funding, of Jewish origin who has actually a Coptic name,’ ‘Bassiley,’ who ‘gathered five million dollars from the Jewish lobby.’ Thus, Niqūlā Bāsīlī Niqūlā was made responsible for this “film,” but the actual responsibility was ascribed to the ‘Jewish lobby’ which ‘believes neither in Christianity nor in Islam at all.’ Interestingly, while the muftī mentioned the involvement of a Copt, he also expressed his relief at the condemnation issued by the Maronite Patriarchate, ‘other’ Christian religious leaders, and Christians ‘in all their religious, spiritual and civil institutions.’ He insisted on the need to not make ‘Christians in Lebanon, in the region or in the world responsible for a single act.’ In addition, he repeated the idea that the video aimed to cause ‘strife (fitna)’ and to hurt both ‘Muslims and Christians’, as it was also an “offense” against Christianity.

On 21 September 2012, Rashīd Qabbānī invited the shuyūkh and imams to dār al-fatwā. In his speech, he expressed his ideas concerning a “Zionist” and “Jewish” background more vividly; ‘Zionist circles which try to destabilise the ranks of coexistence.” Therefore, ‘Zionism is the enemy of religion which it fought in the West.’ In particular, the muftī criticized the “West” for its double standards; ‘We ask: why do the United States and the European countries forbid Anti-Semitism but do not issue a law forbidding enmity towards religion (‘adā’ li l-dīn)?’ Therefore, he demanded a criminalization of causing “offense” and mentioned the upcoming spiritual summit, saying ‘Christians and Muslims in Lebanon are strongly united (yad wāḥida)’ (see Section 3.6.1).

In contrast, in his appearance on Hezbollah-owned al-Manār, the muftī did not dwell at length on the issue of “Zionism,” but only mentioned the reported funding of five million dollars. He particularly criticized the double-standards of the West which practiced ‘racism against Muslims under the pretence of secularism.’ He reminded the audience of the fact that Islam had been victim of such ‘attacks’ since it first began and stressed that he considered the timing to be intentional.

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Aside from Rashīd Qabbānī, the muftī of Tripoli, shaykh Mālik al-Shiʿār, also reacted to the video.597 He described the video as ‘the film offending the Messenger and 1.5 billion Muslims,’ a ‘trouble-making and hurtful act’ staged by ‘worldwide Judaism (al-yahūdiyya al-ʾalāmiyya).’ Yet according to Mālik al-Shiʿār, this video was unsurprising for ‘worldwide Judaism’ which has not refrained from harming ‘our beloved Messenger, the other prophets and messengers.’ In addition, he condemned this video as the product of a certain kind of freedom that allowed the ‘attack on the prophet of Muslims.’

All these reactions are elaborate and demonstrate a lack attempts at mobilizing Muslims in protests. Interestingly, the muftī began by accusing the United States of involvement, and then went on to accuse “Zionism,” “the Jews” and Israel, but exactly which one is never explicitly mentioned.

3.3.1.2 The Shia Community

The Shia gained recognition as a separate community under the French mandate which created the jaʾfarī tribunals (Mervin 2000, 394). However, these tribunals’ competences were limited to personal matters and fiqh (Shahnahan 2005, 162). Thus, in 1967, following the efforts of the Shia cleric and leader Mūsā al-Ṣadr, law number 72/1967 established a separate representative body for the Shia community, the Higher Islamic Shia Council (al-majlis al-islāmī al-shīʿī al-aʾlā) (Rabbath 1986, 127-129). This marked the final step towards full emancipation from the Sunni institutions. As a result, this Shia institution is much more independent and powerful and has greater legitimacy than the dār al-fatwā. It is composed of a legal committee and an executive committee (Rougier 2004, 118). The legal committee is made up of twelve ʿulamāʾ that are elected by all the ʿulamāʾ in Lebanon with a religious diploma (Rougier 2004, 118), whereas the executive committee is composed among others of current judges and various muftī, current and former MPs, magistrates of the judiciary, university professors, lawyers, doctors, engineers, and presidents of local councils (Rabbath 1986, 127-129). Currently, this Higher Islamic Shia council is led by ʿAbd al-Amīr Qabalān, its vice-president (Mervin 2012, 345), because the actual president, Mūsā al-Ṣadr, has continued to be its president even after his disappearance in Libya in 1978.

The reactions of the religious representatives of the Shia community comprised official declarations and the participation in Christian-Muslim reactions. ʿAbd al-Amīr Qabalān’s reactions were reported by several media outlets on 13 September 2012, and on 18 September,

as well as in the context of a meeting with the Gathering of Islamic ‘ulamā’ (tajammu’ al-‘ulamā’ al-muslimīn). In addition, the Higher Islamic Shia Council issued two statements and there are two additional reactions. Section 3.6.2.3 will discuss the organization of a Christian-Muslim conference in the dār al-ja’farī in Tyr.

On approximately September 13, the vice-president of the Higher Islamic Council, ‘Abd al-Amīr Qabalān, was reported to have condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” as ‘a cowardly act,’ displaying ‘deeply buried feelings of hatred,’ and funded by the ‘Zionist movement.’ This video allegedly aimed to ‘distort the image of Islam and create strife between Christians and Muslims.’ Therefore, ‘Abd al-Amīr Qabalān saw the best reaction to the video as an intensification of Muslim-Christian relations.

In his reaction, reported on September 18 by al-Anwar, ‘Abd al-Amīr Qabalān defended Islam at length, describing it as a ‘white page and an oasis for goodness, justice, and humanity.’ In particular, he depicted Muhammad as the embodiment of a ‘model of humanity and of moral values. He is great in his moderate reason, in his blessed sayings and in his movement.’ After having defined a universal mission for Muhammad, ‘Abd al-Amīr Qabalān concluded that the offense ‘of his person is an attack on humanity and the spiritual values Muhammad represents.’ In addition, he called on Islamic and Arabic governments to pressure the United States into prosecuting the “offenders,” and remained very vague regarding the background of “The Innocence of Muslims.”

When receiving a delegation of the Gathering of Islamic Ulema (tajammu’ al-‘ulamā’ al-muslimīn), ‘Abd al-Amīr Qabalān repeated his idea of “Zionist” responsibility for this video and also expressed his concern regarding the discord between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

Interestingly, the statement issued by the executive committee (hay’at al-tablīgh al-dīnī) of the Higher Islamic Shia Council and quoted in al-Anwar on 19 September 2012 is both very elaborate in its reflection and implicit and vague on the issue itself. Thus, “The Innocence of Muslims” was defined as one of ‘(especially) the latest offenses (isāʾāt) against Islam and the prophet Muhammad,’ ‘the uncivilized phenomenon,’ ‘the offenses and excesses,’ ‘the deviating and uncivilized phenomena,’ ‘the inhuman anomaly,’ ‘these shameful and heavy defects,’ ‘this

598 Al-Anwar. 14 September 2012.
599 Al-Anwar. 18 September 2012.
The video was framed in a very moralizing way as an example of moral deviation and anomalies. The whole issue was seemingly interpreted as a piece of puppet theatre, governed by ‘hidden hands who do not want peace and stability in this world, but a climate of discord, blood, evil, and crime.’ The Higher Islamic Shia Council considered the video a call to all that was evil, as mentioned previously, and to a climate of ‘religious and political extremism with the color of blood and the stamp of takfīr and murder.’ It was also viewed as the product of “faulty democracies” that result from ‘an old Christian error and a new Islamic mistake of representing the prophets and sacred items in art’ and has a very dangerous ‘impact on creed, culture, and behavior.’ The council considered the video to be creating ‘discord (fitna) and an image of Islam that is not true.’ Overall, the responsibility for this purportedly deviant and perverse act was ascribed to cultural, civilizational, and moral conditions. As a result, the council justified the violent reactions, as a ‘natural expression’ that ‘equals the amount of offense.’ In addition, it also explicitly criticized Christian religious practices such as use of icons. In contrast, the council defined a necessary opposition composed of the believers and the ‘free ones (al-aḥrār)’ whose awareness needs to be raised, of religious institutions which are ‘not allowed to remain hands crossed’ and a law forbidding this, at UN level.

Eventually, in late September 2012, the Higher Islamic Shia Council issued another statement under the leadership of ʿAbd al-Amīr Qabalān and mentioned this issue once again; ‘the crime committed against the right (ḥaqq) of the Messenger of God, Muhammad, and the immoral offense against him.’ Interestingly, the precise object of the offense was clearly mentioned this time; ‘the latest film and the offending cartoons in some French and European newspapers,’ meaning the cartoons published in Charlie Hebdo. The fact that the cartoons were published in a French magazine seemed to have eased the mention of a background. This implies that the council was well aware of the Coptic background but that it was too sensitive an issue to be mentioned. Therefore, it preferred to refer to ‘invisible hands.’ This new condemnation did not place the issue in a context of social and moral deviation, but rather expressed its rejection of the pretense of democracy and freedom of opinion,’ aimed at ‘weakening Muslims.’ The statement also related the satisfaction felt with the broad condemnation. Nevertheless, it still called on ‘official, religious human rights institutions, the

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Arab League, (and) the Organization of Islamic Conference’ to address the UN appealing for a law prohibiting the offense of religions. The Higher Islamic Shia Council also referred to the issue of kidnapped Lebanese in Syria, the conflicts in Syria and Bahrain, as well as the measures of the army.

In addition, al-Anwar reported a gathering of the ‘ulamāʾ of Tyre (Ṣūr) under the leadership of shaykh ‘Alī Yāsīn. The ‘ulamāʾ issued a statement in which they praised Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh’s speech.\(^{603}\) All in all, the statement seems to lean heavily towards Hezbollah, because the ‘ulamāʾ considered it a ‘duty for every free human being’ to participate in Hezbollah’s protest in Tyre on 19 September 2012. This statement also defined an enemy; ‘It is a duty to preserve the holy icon which equals the army, the people and the resistance against the Zionist enemy.’\(^{604}\) After that, ‘Alī Yāsīn delivered a speech at a sit-in staged by the Palestinian Islamic Authority in the refugee camp al-Buṣṣ, in which he stated ‘There is no difference between Muslims and Christians, there is a Zionist-American plan against the Arab world and the region.’

Furthermore, we have the reaction of a member of the Higher Islamic Shia Council, ‘Afīf al-Nābulsī, who was born in 1941 in the district of Sidon and was trained in Najaf.\(^{605}\) He founded the Authority of the ‘ulamāʾ of South Lebanon (hay’at ‘ulamāʾ Jabal Ṭāmil), which ‘Abbās al-Mīsawī, the former secretary general of Hezbollah, was also a member of (ibid). ‘Afīf al-Nābulsī promotes resistance against the ‘Zionist plan in Lebanon’ (ibid). He briefly mentioned “The Innocence of Muslims” while he was receiving a delegation of Palestinian intellectuals on or around 18 September 2012.\(^{606}\) He described the video as ‘one of the faces of the enemy of this enmity.’ He also criticized the attempts of the United States and Israel to fight Palestinian identity and memory, and asserted that it was not possible to separate military resistance from cultural resistance.

3.3.1.3 The Druze Community

The status of the Druze community is regulated by a law issued in 1962 which established two religious leaders or shaykh al-‘aql (Rabbath 1986, 113). Following a change to this law in 2006, the community is currently governed by one shaykh al-‘aql who is directly elected by all Druze males aged over 21 (Rougier 2004, 118), and by a Druze Spiritual Council.

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\(^{603}\) Al-Anwar. 18 September 2012.


\(^{606}\) Al-Tawhid. 18 September 2012.

1892 مزيد من المواقف الشاجبة للفيلم المسيء للأسلام ..
1893 وأوجه الحفاظ على الأطروحة المقدسة وهي معادلة الجيش والشعب والمقاومة من أجل مواجهة العدوان الصهيوني.
1895 تواصل المواقف المنددة والغضب في المجتمع المدني والسياسي في لبنان جراء بث الفيلم المسيء للأسلام.
(al-majlis al-madhhabī al-durzī) composed of both permanent and elected members. The fixed members are made up of current ministers, current and former MPs, judges and the highest judges, among others (ibid). As a result of the reform in 2006, the Druze community is split between two political streams and leaders, and two shaykh al-aql. The official shaykh al-ʿaql, Naʿīm Ḥasan, in power since 2006, is affiliated to Walīd Junbalāṭ, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party. However, Walīd Junbalāṭ’s political rival, Ṭalāl Arslān, who also comes from a famous and powerful Druze family, has declared Naṣr al-Dīn al-Gharīb shaykh al-ʿaql (ibid). In early September 2012, elections for a new term of the Druze Spiritual Council took place. The Progressive Socialist Party won 76% of the votes and the former minister Wāʿīm Wahhāb, who entered the poll, won 24% (ibid).

The reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” reflected these divisions within the Druze community, as both Naʿīm Ḥasan and Naṣr al-Dīn al-Gharīb reacted officially. In addition, a Druze cleric participated in a Christian-Muslim conference organized by tajammuʿ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn (3.6.2) and another cleric might have participated in a similar local reaction, although this is uncertain (see Section 3.6.3).

On September 14, Naʿīm Ḥasan was quoted as condemning the ‘offense against Islam and the person of the most noble messenger,’ as an attack on ‘religious symbols and values.’ He demanded the conservation of ‘brotherhood among the sons of the revealed religions and maintenance of the coexistence (al-ʿaysh al-mushtarak) between Christians and Muslims in (all) the parts of the world.’

On 22 September 2012, Naʿīm Ḥasan invited all the elected and permanent members of the Druze Spiritual Council as well as the president of the Druze courts and the judges to his headquarters in Beirut to discuss the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims.” The council’s statement asserted that ‘in its content, in its timing and in its aim’, the video - and the cartoons - ‘disregard the values embodied by the greatest prophet and it intentionally offends the perfume of his life […] without any regard for the feelings of Muslims.’ However, it also criticized the...
violence in connection with these two issues; Muslims were called on to ‘control their mind, to plead, to pray, and take responsible action to support Islam and the most noble prophet.” The statement issued by this gathering repeated this condemnation of the violence and called for ‘responsible and aware reactions.” Similarly, it viewed the video and the cartoons as an ‘offense against humanity and human dignity’ under the pretense of freedom of expression (ibid). It also insisted on the issue of ‘strife’ which these ‘offenses’ sought to cause: ‘strife and tensions between the followers of the revealed religions’ (ibid). Eventually, the statement formulated two messages; one addressed to the UN and international organizations to use the existing laws and pass new ones to prevent such “offenses,” and the second addressed to ‘Muslim and Christian Lebanese for continued solidarity and unity’ (ibid).

Alongside the official representatives of the Druze community, Naṣr al-Dīn al-Gharīb also issued two comments on “The Innocence of Muslims.” In both cases, he insisted on its “Zionist” background. On September 13, al-Tawḥīd quoted a statement issued by Naṣr al-Dīn al-Gharīb, in which he declared the ‘film’ to be an ‘violation of Islam’ by the United States and Israel. He stated that ‘Peace and brotherhood must be preserved between the people, especially between the Islamic people and the Christian peoples (shuʿūb).’ In his statement published on September 18, on al-Tawḥīd, Naṣr al-Dīn al-Gharīb insisted more firmly on the “Zionist-Israeli background;” ‘It is not surprising that Zionism offends Islam and the Messenger of God, as it also offends Christianity and even its [own] religion and its [own] prophets.”

Here, al-Gharīb alludes to verse 3:181 and 183:

Allah has certainly heard the statement of those [Jews] who said, “Indeed, Allah is poor, while we are rich.” We will record what they said and their killing of the prophets without right and will say, “Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire. […] [They are] those who said, "Indeed, Allah has taken our promise not to believe any messenger until he brings us an offering which fire [from heaven] will consume.” Say, "There have already come to you messengers before me with clear proofs and [even] that of which you speak. So why did you kill them, if you should be truthful?”

Concerning this, he referred to Israel’s practices of ‘murder, crimes, (and) hate’ in the Palestinian ‘occupied territories.’ In addition, Naṣr al-Dīn al-Gharīb mentioned the ‘stirring up

615 Al-Tawhid. 18 September 2012. تواصل المواقف المنددة والغضب في المجتمع المدني والسياسي عن تهديد النصب立てللمسيحيين، الإسلام.
of strife (futun) and the agitating of people,’ not as an aim in itself, but rather as a consequence. Furthermore, he criticized the silence of some rulers who allegedly did not hesitate to condemn the violent reactions, and praised the visit by Pope Benedict XVI.

Two aspects of these reactions are particularly interesting. On the one hand, these Druze figures insisted on the unity between all followers of the revealed religions, probably referring to themselves, the heterodox Druze, more so given the history of enmity between Druze and Maronite Christians. On the other hand, however, the content and formulation of these reactions seemed to place the Druze within an Islamic Orthodox framework by referring to the Quran and the veneration of Muhammad, although this does not actually necessarily comply with traditional Druze teachings. Moreover, the official religious Druze leadership defined “the other” as offensive freedom of speech, whereas Naṣr al-Dīn al-Gharīb denounced “Zionism” as the other.

3.3.1.4 The Alawite Community

Defined as a ‘forgotten sect’ by al-Akhbār, little is known about the Alawis of Lebanon. Both their recognition and their sectarian institution are very recent. An Islamic Alawi council (al-majlis al-islāmī al-‘alawī) was only established in 2009 (al-Akhbar 8 November 2011) and shaykh Asad ʿĀṣī was elected its president. The figures for this community range from 70,000 to 120,000 people living mostly in the Jabal Muḥsin area of Tripoli and in the ‘Akkār region; the community is generally very poor (al-Akhbar 8 November 2011). Under the leadership of the ‘Ayd family, the Lebanese Alawis have entered the “sectarian” game by setting up a party to represent them, the Arab Democratic Party (al-ḥizb al-ʿarabī al-dīmūqrāṭī); however, its leadership has been increasingly questioned (ibid). Furthermore, it was only with the Taif Agreement that the Alawis began to be represented in Lebanon. Previously, some had converted to Sunni or Shia Islam in order to achieve (better) state positions (ibid). Since 1992, the Alawis have been allotted two seats in parliament as well as an ambassador and higher ranking official state positions in addition to the Alawi militias that appeared during the Civil War and were integrated into the Lebanese security forces (ibid). Contact with the Syrian regime was reportedly established during the Civil War when the regime supplied the community in Tripoli with support (ibid). The Arab Democratic Party was aligned with the March 8 Alliance.


On September 13, a statement by the president of the Islamic Alawi Council, Asad ʿĀṣī, was published on Lebanon Files. In this statement, he described “The Innocence of Muslims” as ‘true intellectual terror’ produced by ‘worldwide Zionism and its dark circles’ which primarily aimed to distort the image of Islam with this video.\(^\text{619}\) Interestingly, the religious leader of the Alawis dwelt at length on Muhammad, whose image the video allegedly sought to tarnish: ‘our ḥanafī Islamic religion,’ ‘his faithful Arabic prophet (PBUH), this symbol of this great religion,’ ‘the prophet of leadership and mercy,’ ‘ḥanafī Islam which is a message from heaven to the earth,’ ‘this holy Islamic symbol.’ This statement emphasizes the adherence of the Alawis to Islam, although this sect originates from the eleventh imam and is often designated as “ghulāt” (extremist, excessive) (by other Islamic groups?).\(^\text{620}\) Within their gnostic cosmogony, the Alawis revere both Muhammad and ʿAlī with the latter being viewed as the incarnation of the essence of God. To some extent, this reaction is justified by the fact that ‘As we understand it, democracy allows us to defend our prophet.’

**Summary of Section 3.3.1**

Although all official Islamic communities harshly condemned the video, the focus of the reactions varied to some extent. For instance, the Islamic Alawi Council and the Druze Spiritual Council insisted on the offense to Muhammad, while the Higher Islamic Shia Council formulated an elaborate criticism of the video as a whole. The accusations levelled against “Zionism” were also recurrent and often anti-Semitic in nature. Overall, this section has shown that the reactions of the official Islamic institutions were limited to issuing condemnations and that they did not seek to actively mobilize their communities.

**3.3.2 The Churches**

Several churches in Lebanon reacted to “The Innocence of Muslims.” These reactions include both of official statements and joint Christian-Muslim reactions. The latter will be analyzed in a subsequent section. The following section, however, will discuss the reactions (and absence of reactions) displayed by the Maronite Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek Catholic Melkite Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, and the Syriac Catholic Church. The analysis of these reactions focuses mainly on the questions of the motivation for the reaction, its relevance and the means employed in the reaction.


\(^{620}\) Encyclopedia Islamica. “Nuṣayriyya.”
3.3.2.1 The Maronite Church

The reactions by the Maronite Church are analyzed in following sections; two reactions by the Maronite Patriarch, mār Bīshāra Buṭrus al-Rāʾī; one reaction by the Bishop of Tripoli (Ṭarābulus), George Bū Jūda; one reaction by the bishop of Tyre (Ṣūr), Shukr Allāh Nabīl al-Ḥājj; and one reaction by Antoine Ḍaw, the secretary general of the Maronite Bishopric Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue (al-lajna al-usqufiyya li l-ḥiwār al-masiḥī al-islāmī). In addition, Bishop Shukr Allāh Nabīl al-Ḥājj; the bishop of Baalbek (Baʿlabakk), Samʿān Šuʾr al-Ḥājj, a representative of the Bishop of ‘Akkār; and the abbot of a monastery in Nabatieh took part in joint Christian-Muslim conferences and there was also a spiritual summit which took place in Bkerké (see Section 3.4). Of all these reactions of the Maronite Church, this section will analyze the declarations.

Al-Rāʾī was born in 1945 and was Bishop of Byblos (Jubayl) from 1990 until his election to Patriarch. Since his election, he has become known for a number of controversial decisions and stances. While former Patriarch Sfeir (Naṣr Allāh Buṭrus Ṣūfair) tended to lean towards the March 14 Alliance, al-Rāʾī seemed to be more accommodating towards the March 8 Alliance and its positions. He visited the Maronite dioceses in Syria and met with Syrian President Bashshār al-Asad in November 2011 (ibid). In addition, he reportedly had a verbal clash with former French President Nicolas Sarkozy over the crisis in Syria in July 2011. As a result, Hezbollah has praised the new patriarch for taking the Lebanese Christians out of ‘Western investment.’ In addition, al-Rāʾī has established a dialogue with all political actors in Lebanon, including Hezbollah. Besides this, according to al-Akhbār, the patriarch has promoted the see of the patriarchate, Bkerké, as an ‘umbrella for all Christian forces’ and has stated that ‘the [Christian] command is [his’], thus allegedly calling into question Samīr Jaʿjaʿ’s assertions that he is the only Christian leader (ibid). However, the patriarch has maintained positive relations with other leaders of the March 14 Alliance such as Amīn al-Jumayyil, Fuʿād al-Sīnīʿura and Saʿd al-Ḥarīrī.

621 Who’s Who: “Rai.”
625 Al-Akhbar English. 29 March 2012. The Maronite Patriarch: Staying the Course One Year After His Election.
Aside from his attendance at the spiritual summit that took place in Bkerké in late September 2012, mār Bishāra Buṭrus al-Rā’ī has had two official reactions to this video. He expressed his view for the first time on 13 September 2012, at a press conference in connection with Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Lebanon (September 15-17, 2012). During the press conference he mentioned “The Innocence of Muslims” very briefly. He referred to the video by its title, “baraʾat al-muslimīn,” as well as ‘the offending film’, a ‘shameful film’, an ‘offense against all of us’, and an ‘attack on all religions’ (al-Nahar 14 September 2012). Furthermore, he demanded the removal of the ‘film’ (al-Safir 14 September 2012; al-Nahar 14 September 2012) and an intervention by the United Nations in this matter (al-Safir 14 September 2012). Interestingly, the patriarch condemned the violence in reaction to this video (al-Safir 14 September 2012; al-Nahar 14 September 2012). Al-Rā’ī also alluded to the visit of the pope and criticized the Arab Spring. He considered the visit ‘a message against the Clash of Civilizations’ (al-Safir 14 September 2012; al-Nahar 14 September 2012) and demanded ‘a true Arab Spring, realized in the Arab countries by Christianity and Islam’ (al-Safir 14 September 2012). In general, the patriarch seems to oppose the idea of an “Arab Spring,” as suggested by his clash with Nicolas Sarkozy over Syria. Al-Rā’ī’s opposition is motivated by the example of Iraq, where ‘democracies have become civil wars and led to the emigration of Christians.’

His reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims” was met apparently with some criticism, as, while he was on his way to India on 19 September 2012, journalists asked the patriarchate whether he supported Ḩasan Naṣr Allāh’s call on the United States to stop the spread of the ‘film.’ The patriarch retorted that he had preceded the secretary general of Hezbollah in his condemnation of the film, and asserted anew that this was ‘an offense’ not only against Islam and ‘his prophet,’ but against all religions. He reminded the journalists of the fact that there were ‘constant offenses against the church, Christians, and the Gospel in movies.’ He insisted on the need for the UN to intervene.

On 14 September 2012, the statement by the bishop of Tripoli, George Bū Jūda, was published, quoting his demand for punishment and an end to such ‘offense.’ The bishop...
viewed “The Innocence of Muslims” as an attack against ‘us,’ whose timing suggests the intention to sow ‘strife between all communities (tawā’īf).’

On 19 September 2012 the bishop of Tyre (Ṣūr), Shukr Allāh Nābil al-Ḥājj, made a television appearance expressing his solidarity with Muslims; ‘enough of this attack on the most sacred (thing) that exists.’

Father Antoine Ḍaw, the secretary general of the Maronite Bishopric Committee for the Christian-Muslim Dialogue (al-lajna al-usqafiyya li l-hiwār al-māsiḥi l-islāmi) gave two reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” On 17 September 2012, he participated in the protest in Beirut organized by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement (see Section 3.1.2) and also in a conference organized by tajammuʿ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn (Section 3.6.2). On 22 September 2012, al-Safir published a statement under the title “Christians and Muslims are Together against the Offense of Religions.”

Antoine Ḍaw was born in 1940 in the region of Jubayl and has been secretary general of this committee for interreligious dialogue since 1990 (Mokrani 2009, 516). He has been a strong advocate of “ʿuruba” (Arabism, French arabité), which, unlike traditional Maronitism, emphasizes a connection to Arab and Islamic civilizational identity.

His criticism of the “The Innocence of Muslims” was an occasion for him to praise Christian-Muslim coexistence in Lebanon. The video was defined as ‘the film barāʿat al-muslimīn’ which offended the great prophet, Islam, and the Muslims,’ a ‘racist attack on Islam under the excuse of Islamophobia or the movement of fear of Islam.’ He accused the video of contradicting the teachings and values of Christianity and Islam and of attacking the ‘culture of Christian-Muslim brotherhood, living together, the partnership in love and the unity in diversity.’ The statement constantly emphasised coexistence, saying, ‘We live with him [the other] in freedom, dignity, safety, peace, and love; this is the essence of the culture of Christian-Muslim dialogue,’ ‘Christians and Muslims together, believing in God Almighty, in the humanity of the human being, in the solidarity of brothers and the sons of the civilization of justice, equality, peace, and love.’ He spoke in the name of Christians and Muslims, but his
comment seemed very abstract. He may be referring to the *Nostrae aestate*, in which Vatican II underlined the common theological and monotheist roots of Christianity and Islam. However, he implicitly criticized the current situation in the Middle East, as he added: ‘We condemn the misuse of religion in conflicts and violent reactions.’ According to Antoine Ṭaw, freedom of religion and the freedom of expression are equally important and need to be dealt with in a responsible manner. In addition, he demanded a UN law prohibiting such acts as the video. Interestingly, he also demanded ‘an honest commitment to the Arab Islamic-Christian awakening.’ This statement might be understood as a criticism of the nature the Arab Spring, much like that made by Patriarch al-Rā‘ī. This statement also epitomized the desire for equality in forging a common future - and a common past - as well as an attempt at appropriation and rooting. Father Ṭaw recalled that ‘the Arabic civilization is our civilization […] we were the fathers of its renaissance [nahda]’ (Mokrani 2009, 521). These are a few examples of a Maronite church that leans towards an Arab identity. Antoine Ṭaw’s reactions were more elaborate than those of other Maronite clerics. He insisted on Christian-Muslims unity grounded in shared values and theological tenants. Yet he does implicitly express some criticisms.

A way to get a feeling for the importance of this issue for the Catholic Church is to take a look at the Maronite bishops’ monthly meetings in October and November 2012. “The Innocence of Muslims” was not mentioned at either of these two meetings. Thus, the reactions issued by different representatives of the Maronite Church may have been motivated by a symbolic show of solidarity with Muslims.

### 3.3.2.2 The Greek Orthodox Church

The Greek Orthodox Church’s reaction is composed of a statement by the Holy Synod and a statement by Bishop George Khudr, as well as of the speeches delivered by the Bishop of ‘Akkār, Bāsīlyūs Mansūr, and his representative, Father Nāyif Iṣṭīfān, in two joint Christian-Muslim conferences (see Section 3.6.4).

The Greek Orthodox Church is the church that has mostly acknowledged an Arab identity; as Patriarch Ignatius IV wrote, ‘the Antiochian Church […] upholds Arab Orthodoxy and Arab Christianity by its own choice’ (Ignatius IV Hazim 2006, 26). This attitude has contributed to a greater accommodation towards Islam. For instance, the Metropolitan Bishop George Khudr stated: ‘We belong to the Islamic civilization. We are from this East’ (Mokrani 635 Diocèse Jounieh, 28 September 2012. Doi: 28بيان اجتماع الأساقفة الموارنة، الجمعة 28-09-2012. http://www.diocesejounieh.org.lb/index.php/2013-02-01-21-33-38/59-2012-01-25-18-44-14/384-28-2012 (retrieved May 17, 2016).
2009, 463). However, this ought not to be understood as an assimilation, but instead as part of the carving out of a necessary and deeply rooted Christian presence in the Middle East (Hager 2016). According to these two leading Greek Orthodox clerics, this peculiar attitude is also the result of being able to differentiate between a political, national identity and a religious identity; ‘Nous sommes d’empire [...] The Orthodox do not mix their religious affiliation with their civil governance.’636 As a result, Bishop George Khudr has tended to promote the Greek Orthodox as more valuable Lebanese citizens because of their non-sectarian stance (Hager 2016). For instance, during the Civil War, the Greek Orthodox did not form militias (although some did join other communities’ militias) and the National Resistance Front against the Israeli occupation was formed by the Greek Orthodox George Háwî.637 Like the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch experienced an internal reform from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, called the “Orthodox Youth Movement.” One of its leading actors was Bishop George Khudr. Yet, unlike the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church followed different world views that can be defined to some extent as a “Protestant” approach to reviving Antiochian heritage with a special focus on the Gospel. This did not lead to its estrangement from Muslims. This youth movement furthered the distinction between religious and political belonging. Yet, unlike in the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Youth Movement was not able to permeate the higher levels of the hierarchy.

In recent years, however, this non-sectarian position has increasingly been questioned and the Holy Synod, which gathered in October 2012 and mentioned “The Innocence of Muslims,” actually dealt first and foremost with the request by some Greek Orthodox Lebanese leaders to establish a “General Civil Commission for the Greek Orthodox in Lebanon.” Since the end of the Civil War, the Greek Orthodox have complained about their lack of representation in the confessional system. Several delegations visited Patriarch Ighnätiyyûs IV Häzim and, in cooperation with Lebanese bishops, submitted a draft for a sectarian institution that would include former deputies, ministers, officers, and former diplomats.638 This initiative was

strongly condemned by the Orthodox Youth Movement because it would ‘entrust the community’s affairs to politicians and man of wealth and influence.’

Yet, this sensitive issue was not mentioned in the final statement issued by the Holy Synod which gathered in the monastery of Balamand from October 2 – 4, 2012. Patriarch Ighnāṭiyūs IV Ḥāzim and the metropolitan bishops of Lebanon, Syria and the “diaspora” all participated in it. The Holy Synod was not able to meet in June 2012 because of the war in Syria. Amongst several other issues, the final statement alluded very implicitly to the video “The Innocence of Muslims” as part of a section entitled “The Media.” The media are said to play a key role in shaping public opinion and are called on to spread the values of ‘knowledge freedom, open-mindedness, and education to promote acceptance of the other.’ It can be assumed that this paragraph actually condemned the video, because the statement went on to mention the bishops’ condemnation of ‘offenses (isāʾāt) against religious symbols and values,’ which targetted both Christianity and Islam and aim to ‘stir up strife (fitna) between the two monotheist religions.’ Furthermore, the synod fathers condemned the violence in reaction to the video, as it ‘contradicts the spirit of Christianity and Islam.’

In a similarly implicit and cryptic manner, the statement mentioned the conflict in Syria and demonstrated a clear attempt to ground the Christians in this region. The Holy Synod insisted on these ‘Eastern Christians’’ ‘scientific, intellectual, and literary’ contribution to ‘Arab civilization’ and stated that they would continue to contribute in the ‘faith in the teachings of the Gospels and ecclesiastical tradition.’ In particular, the statement underlined the Greek Orthodox Church’s role in ‘uncovering the original face serving the human being’ and added that ‘they are the sons of love and of evangelical meekness.” Thus the denominations “al-rūm al-urthūdhuks” (Greek Orthodox) and “Eastern Christians” are interchangeable. As a result, the statement demanded equality in rights and duties and rejects the concept that it is a “minority.”

In contrast, Bishop George Khudr’s condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” in an article entitled “The Attack on Islam” in al-Nahār on 29 September 2012, was much more

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641 Arab Orthodoxy. 3 October 2012. The Youth Movement Rejects the Plan for a “Civil Commission.” Al-Akhbar.
642 للتكنيسة الأرثوذكسية الأرثوذكسية المناصرة في الشرق العربيّ، أن تؤدي دور الرياد في إظهار وجه المسيحية الأصول الخالد للإنسان من دون “النظر إلى انتمائه العرقي أو الديني” "هم أبناء المحبّة والوداعة الإنجيلية"
explicit. George Khuḍr was born in 1923 in the northern city of Tripoli in a Christian neighborhood surrounded by Muslims (Fleyfel 2011, 177). In 1943, he participated in a protest against the French mandate and, at that time, he became involved in the Orthodox Youth Movement (ibid), as mentioned previously. He has been one of the most prolific bishops of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch. Thanks to his weekly column in *al-Nahār*, he is a leading actor in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. As he stated in this article published on 29 September 2012, he has taught Islamic sciences at the University of Balamand (Fleyfel 2011, 178).

His condemnation of the “The Innocence of Muslims” begins by undermining it and then by presenting the Lebanese “counter-model.” In this article, George Khuḍr states that he has seen the film and can thus refute it as having no ‘true foundation.’ He considers the ‘film’ an ‘offending film’ and also mentions the latest cartoons in the ‘French magazine’ *Charlie Hebdo*. More generally, he views all of this as part of a ‘phenomenon’ reaching back to the cartoons of Muhammad in a Danish magazine in 2006. As for the film’s background, the bishop remains very vague, merely suggesting that it seems ‘as if there were behind it an orchestra intending to divide’ and placing it in the more general context of “Western” hatred of Islam. In doing this, he uses the vocabulary of war; ‘Why this attack by the West on Islam?’ ‘There is a desire to beat Islam, with mockery and revenge,’ ‘What is there in the mentality of producers of cinema films or press articles that [leads them] to attack Islam?’ As a result, he asks himself whether there are any political forces combatting Islam and feels compelled to ‘define it as an act of politics and the secret services.’ George Khuḍr also alternates between the use of “we,” when evoking his personal experience and his condemnation of the video, and “I,” when speaking in the name of Muslims and Christians. This latter framework is introduced by self-designations like ‘We Arab Christians,’ ‘our region,’ ‘we are one, the umma of God.’ At the same time, however, there is a constant “other,” an external enemy, in the shape of the West; ‘The West has to understand that the crusades are over.’ George Khuḍr insists on the video having no connection to ‘Christianity, as a religion, institution or people’ and expresses both his complete solidarity with Muslims and his esteem for ‘Arab Muslim religious leaders’ who have been able to differentiate the Christians from this “film.” Interestingly, this issue leads him to dwell on Lebanon, where ‘Christian theological institutions teach Islam to Christians and Muslims alike,’ and to define the history of Christian-Muslim relations. The statement ‘We the Arab Christians, since the conquest, we have decided to live with Muslims in peace and

social unity with total liberty for all’ is not only a redefinition of the history of Christian-Muslim relations, but it also shows a strong intention to overcome the status of victim and subject and to redefine Christians and Muslims as equal partners. In addition, he mentions Muhammad as ‘the Arab messenger,’ the ‘Arab prophet.’

While the condemnation made by the Holy Synod was very implicit, George Khodr’s reaction reflected an elaborate reflection on this issue, insisting on Christian-Muslim unity. This unity rests on a shared history, equality between Muslims and Christians and a common enemy.

3.3.2.3 The Greek Catholic Melkite Church

In the case of this church, there are three separate reactions to the video; i.e. three declarations. On 13 September 2012, the Greek Catholic patriarch, Gregorius III Lahhām,645 issued a statement in the name of all the Catholic churches in Syria, condemning both the video and the violence following it, stating ‘These people do not know how to defend Islam.’646 Instead, the patriarch called for ‘love, mutual respect and meeting, dialogue.’647

In addition, there are two reactions from the Bishop of Firzil and Zahlé (Firzil, Zaḥla wa l-Biqā‘), ʻĪṣām Yūḥannā Darwīsh. Bishop Darwīsh was born in 1945 in Damascus but grew up in Lebanon, in the Chouf region (al-Shūf).648 In 1992, the Melkite Holy Synod elected him bishop of Australia and he subsequently became the head of the bishops of the “diaspora” (ibid). In 2011, he was elected bishop of the diocese of Zahlé (ibid), one of the most important Greek Catholic dioceses, as the city of Zahlé (al-Zaḥla) has a strong Greek Catholic presence (Chaoul 2012, 435-437). He has been very critical of the Arab Spring, especially in Syria, which he views as ‘a conspiracy against the Arabs, both Muslims and Christians, but Christians, especially, are subjected to submission.’649 According to him, the aim of this conflict is to ‘change the East into one sect […] Israel is the greatest beneficiary’ (ibid). This is an example of this church’s strong stance against Israel (see Chapter 4).

In an interview published at the end of September 2012, Bishop ʻĪṣām Yūḥannā Darwīsh described “The Innocence of Muslims” as a threat for the very values of morality, and asserted

645 Patriarch Gregorius III Lahhām was born in 1933 in Dārayyā, Syria, and, from 1981 until his election to the patriarchate in 2000, was patriarchal vicar in Jerusalem (Proche Orient Chrétien. 2000. 50. 3-4, 371).
that, ‘through our unity, Christians and Muslims, have joint responsibility for the defense and the conservation of the spiritual values in the whole world.’ In addition, during a mass in a village in the Beqaa valley, the bishop once again referred to the video. In his sermon, he condemned the various ‘offenses’ that had of late primarily targeted Islam. However, any mention he made to its background was still very vague, ‘the enemies of all revealed religions.’ In addition, he called on Christians to remain ‘steadfast to the land.’ This mass gathered high-ranking visitors such as the former bishop of Zahlé, André Ḥaddād, the former vice-speaker of parliament, İlí Firzlī, and the Greek Catholic politician and “political leader (za īm)” Iliyās Skāf (ibid).

**3.3.2.4 The Armenian Apostolic Church**

The Armenian Apostolic Church displayed two types of interesting reactions; the brief reaction given by the Armenian patriarch of Cilicia, Ārām I, and the differing reactions in Armenia. During the spiritual summit in Bkerké, Ārām I condemned the film and ‘similar plans’ which did not ‘embody the freedom of speech, but offend holy values and principals’ to the media. He added that ‘Christianity and Islam believe in peace and not in violence, in dialogue and not in being distanced’ (ibid). He insisted on the long history of accommodation between the two: ‘these religions have lived in the Middle East for centuries’ (ibid). Interestingly, the patriarchate of Etchmiadzin and the Armenian Republic officially condemned “The Innocence of Muslims.”

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650 Zenit. 28 September 2012. Doi: http://www.zenit.org/ar/articles/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%8B%D9%8A-A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%8D%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%83%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%B5%D9%88%D8%B1 (retrieved October 6, 2013).


3.3.2.5 The Armenian Catholic Church

At the end of September 2012, the Armenian Catholic Church gathered for a Synod in Lebanon and in its final statement it mentioned – very vaguely – the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims,” as the last of five subjects:

The fathers of the Synod condemned the violations that insult the sanctity of religions and their sacred symbols, and it calls for unity in the faith of the One God, calling to implement His books and revealed commandments, and in the faith of spiritual and moral values, and of the family in one united society.654

The Synod also referred to the Armenian genocide, the “Year of Faith” Pope Benedict XVI had announced, the study and implementation of the Apostolic Exhortation, youth participation in World Youth Day, and the letter to the pope thanking him for his visit.

3.3.2.6 The Syriac Catholic Church

The Holy Synod of the Syriac Catholic Church also took place in September 2012 but did not mention the film at all. Instead, it expressed its concerns about the situation in Iraq, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon.655

Summary of Section 3.3.2

Except for reactions by George Khuḍr and Antoine Daw, these other condemnations show that they were mainly motivated by the desire to provide a symbolic show of solidarity. Interestingly, while the title of the video was more readily mentioned, the references to it were sometimes particularly implicit, subsumed under the umbrella of “The Media” or “The Offense on Religion.”

3.4 The State

This section will analyse the reactions of the “state” which comprise declarations by the president, Michel Sleiman (Mīshāl Sulaymān); the prime minister, Najib Miqāṭī; four ministers, the minister of Foreign Affairs, ʿAdnān Manṣūr, the agriculture minister, Ḥusayn al-Ḥājj al-Ḥasan, the minister for youth and sports, Fayṣal Kirāmī, and the minister of expatriates, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Tirrū; as well as the reaction of a parliamentary committee. The reaction provided by the parliamentary speaker, Nabih Berri (Nabīḥ Bīrī), is not mentioned in this section, because

his comment reflected his position as a leading figure of the March 8 Alliance rather than his position as parliamentary speaker.

President Sulaymān reportedly issued two reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” The first time he mentioned the video was probably on 13 September 2012, during the preparations for Benedict XVI’s visit. He defined it as ‘a negative film about Muhammad,’ ‘a film of this kind’ produced by an individual ‘maybe Zionist.’ He considered the “film” proof of ‘decay at the level of civilized values’ which ‘offends public freedoms, human rights, and all democratic principles,’ values the West believes in. He stated that Lebanon ‘est totalement le contraire de ce qui s’est produit à travers le film négatif sur le prophète Mohammed.’ In addition, he condemned the violent reactions in some countries, whereas, ironically, Lebanon was actually used as an example of how the reactions to the video should have been. It was probably the following day, on September 14, that Mīshāl Sulaymān once again mentioned this video when receiving the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Zaka I. He again condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” as a ‘film offending the Islamic community (ṭāʾifa),’ and ‘a criminal act, whatever its reasons may be.’ However, he mainly condemned the violent and unjustifiable reactions to it; ‘What happened contradicts the principle of the protection of general freedoms.’ This condemnation did not seem to refer to the violent clashes that happened in Tripoli that same day, as Mīshāl Sulaymān once again underlined the ‘good example’ set by Lebanon.

Prime Minister Najīb Mīqātī’s various comments on “The Innocence of Muslims” seemed to vary according to whom he was addressing. On 14 September 2012, he was quoted in al-Safir as saying the video was part of series of ‘offenses (isāʾāt)’ against Islam and referred to its condemnation by all confessions. In this quotation, he also condemned the violent reactions. This same condemnation was repeated during his telephone call with Hillary Clinton, then US secretary of the State Department, to whom he conveyed his condolences for the killing of the US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, and during his meeting with the US

During this latter conversation, he condemned the targeting of the US consulate in Benghazi as contradicting ‘the teachings of the ḥanafī Islamic religion’ and stated: ‘It is not possible to make a friend, the American people, bear the responsibility for a single act’ (ibid). In contrast, during his meeting with representatives of international organizations and diplomats from Western and Arab countries in the Serail, Najīb Mīqātī stated that Israel was responsible for this video, as it paralleled the ‘Israeli war against the Palestinian cause.’ He also demanded measures on an international level to counter what he saw as the goals of the video.

Similarly, the minister of Foreign Affairs, ʿAdnān Manṣūr, also criticized the video as an ‘offense’ as well as criticising the violent reactions to it. He likewise underlined its condemnation by all the confessions in Lebanon. Later, he was praised calling an urgent meeting at the Arab League to discuss the issue of this video. ʿAdnān Manṣūr is a Shia and member of the Amal Movement.

The minister of agriculture, Ḥusayn al-Ḥājj al-Ḥasan reacted to “The Innocence of Muslims” during a pedagogic event in the Nabatieh province. He described the video as ‘the latest film offending the Messenger of humanity’ and he attributed it to ‘American, Zionist and Western intelligence circles’ that reportedly use all means to try to provoke strife in the region. Interestingly, however, he also mentioned the visit by Benedict XVI which gave him the opportunity to promote the model of Lebanon ‘from the viewpoint of an original muhammadian position, a resisting Islam, the Lebanese citizenship, of belonging to the Arab community and to the Islamic community, from all these positions, our message is that Lebanon is the nation of message.’ This message was further defined as being one of ‘coexistence, love, and living together.’ It is the nation (waṭan) of resistance against occupation.’ In addition, Lebanon was

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663 Sky News. 17 September 2012. لبنان: سلسلة واسعة من المواقف المنددة من الأحزاب والجمعيات والشخصيات الإسلامية والمعاصية الوطنية والإنجليزية للنبي محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم. Doi: http://www.skynewsarabia.com/web/article/45627/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A1-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A (retrieved May 17, 2016).
defined as the ‘civilizational and intellectual connection between Islam and Christianity,’ ‘our message is the message of the prophet of Islam and the prophet of love.’ This is a very elaborate declaration that used the video as an opportunity to establish Lebanon as a model for coexistence, referring in particular to the image coined by John Paul II of Lebanon as a message when he visited in May 1997 (Hager 2016).

In his reaction, the minister for youth and sports, Faysal Kiram, seemed to refer to positions expressed by Hezbollah’s secretary general as he described it as the video offending the ‘life and person of the most noble Messenger, Muhammad.’ Kiram saw the video as aiming to ‘spread hatred and division between Muslims and Christians.’ Interestingly, Kiram stated that Muslims were expected to react violently against Christians in the region. Faysal Kiram asserted that he supported the way Nasr Allah dealt with the “film,” yet he condemned the violence and praised the ‘clear and swift positions’ of the churches, especially of Patriarch al-Ra’i and Mishal A’wn. However, A’wn’s reaction was not actually very vocal (see Section 3.2.1).

In contrast, the minister of expatriates and member of the Progressive Socialist Party, ‘Ala’ al-Din Tirru, criticized the timing of the video and the violence following it, calling on Muslims and Christians to stand as ‘one united community.’

On September 20, al-Anwar reported on the statement issued by a parliamentary committee composed of a dozen MPs. The parliamentary vice-president, Farid Makari, read a declaration that dealt with several subjects, among them the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims” and the cartoons published in Charlie Hebdo. This video was described as an ‘offense against the revealed religions, especially the spread of the American film entitled “The Innocence of Muslims” and the spread of pictures in a French magazine.’ The committee called on the government to take measures against such acts and called for a prohibition of the spread of film on the internet.

**Summary of Section 3.4**

The reactions of the state representatives are very heterogeneous. The president and the prime minister (unlike the speaker of the parliament, Nabih Berri, see Section 3.2.1) were both particularly much more cautious. Overall, the reactions condemned the violent clashes which

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668 Al-Tawhid. 18 September 2012. تواصل المواد المنددة والغضب في المجتمع المدني والسياسي في لبنان جراء بث الفيلم المسيء للاسلام.

were a reaction to the video. Aside from the minister of Foreign Affairs, the state did not take any direct measures against the video.

3.5 The Reactions of non-Political and Non-Official Actors

This section comprises the reactions of a broad range of non-political and non-official actors such as Islamist actors and organizations (5.3.1), Christian organizations (5.3.2) and other organizations (5.3.3).

3.1.1 Islamist Actors and Organizations: Competing for the Leadership

To some extent, this section is concerned with two sorts of Islamist streams, the anti-Hezbollah preacher Aḥmad al-Asīr (3.5.1.1) on the one hand, and a broad network of Sunni-Shia Islamist clerics (ʿulamāʾ) on the other, who tend to sympathize with the anti-colonial Islam promoted by Hezbollah (and Iran) (section 3.5.1.4 and 3.5.1.5).

3.5.1.1 Aḥmad al-Asīr

The controversy surrounding the video “The Innocence of Muslims” provided Aḥmad al-Asīr with a crucial opportunity to establish himself as the political leader of the Sunni community.

Aḥmad al-Asīr was born in Sidon (Ṣaydā) to a Sunni father and a Shia mother. Named the capital of the South, Sidon is a very important centre of Islamism and Islamist movements. It is there that al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya, al-fajr and other streams originate from. Aḥmad al-Asīr studied at the Sharia faculty of the dār al-fatwā, but did not finish his degree and initially joined al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya (ibid). However, he soon criticized the movement for having a political outlook instead of focusing on religious matters (ibid). Therefore, he turned to a preaching movement that originated from southern Asia, Tablighi Jamaat (tablīgh-i jamāʿat) (ibid). When he started preaching in the Bilal mosque in Sidon, he consistently avoided political issues, and in particular ‘sought to separate the religious-ideological beliefs of Hezbollah’s followers from the victory against Israel.’

670 Al-Hayat. 15 March 2014. Doi: http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/1139661/%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B5%D9%91%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%87%D9%91%D9%85-%D8%A5%D9%86%D9%91%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%AD%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B3 (retrieved May 17, 2016). In this paragraph, this source is quoted as “al-Hayat 15 March 2014.”

671 Al-Akhbar English. 6 March 2012. Ahmad al-Assir: A Salafi with a Difference. Doi: http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/ahmad-al-assir-salafi-difference (retrieved May 17, 2016). In this paragraph, this source is quoted as “al-Akhbar 6 March 2012.”
there were increasing reports about ‘the persecution of the Sunni community at the hands of the resistance’ (ibid). Then al-Asīr started directing verbal attacks against Hezbollah and the ‘hegemonic project of the party of resistance.’\(^{672}\) Aḥmad al-Asīr consistently tried to avoid the name “Hezbollah” (literally “the party of God”) and instead resorted to circumlocutions like “the party of resistance.” He also stated: ‘Our problem is with Hezbollah and Iran’ (ibid). Thus, al-Asīr tried to distinguish between “two types of Shia;” on the one hand there were the Shia embodied by Mūsā al-Ṣadr and on the other hand there were the Shia embodied by Khomaynī and Hezbollah (ibid). At the same time, Hezbollah was criticized for having drawn attention to this previously unknown preacher from Sidon.\(^{673}\) A second turning point came at the beginning of the war in Syria and the successive involvement of a number of Lebanese political actors. From then on, Aḥmad al-Asīr seemed to have become an actor who was notorious for promoting the Sunni-Shia divide (al-Akhbar 6 March 2012). In doing so, he came to fill a leadership gap within the Sunni community. As previously mentioned, this community has faced a serious political and religious crisis and in 2012 was facing a leadership vacuum. The March 14 Alliance, in particular, has been vocal in its opposition to Hezbollah. As a result, in September 2012, the preacher was ‘filling a vacuum among Syria’s and Hezbollah’s enemies in Lebanon’ according to al-Akhbār. In addition, his fellowship went beyond the Sunni community, or at least Sunni Lebanese youths from Sidon, also comprising newly religious Palestinian and Syrian youth from Sidon with little education (al-Hayāt 15 March 2014). In April 2014, al-Hayāt estimated that his followers numbered a few hundred (ibid).

In his statement as a political Sunni leader, Aḥmad al-Asīr resorted to using “the Christians” as political assets. During a visit to ʿAkkār in December 2012, he met with leading figures of the region, among them Christian leaders (POC 2013, 195). He stated: ‘We want to emphasize coexistence. We have to extend our hand, especially to Christians. The Christians are the closest to us. We have coexisted with them for 1,400 years’ (ibid). In addition, in early September 2012, Samīr Jaʿjaʿ’s visit to al-Asīr provoked protests in Sidon because of crimes committed in that city by the Lebanese Forces during the civil war.\(^{674}\) Eventually, the polarization reached such a level that in November 2012 al-Asīr was expected to announce the creation of a militia.\(^{675}\) However, Palestinian Islamist forces reportedly said that they would not


support such an escalation (ibid). However, al-Asīr’s followers of regularly clashed with the Lebanese army and killed soldiers.676 He also became involved in the war in Syria and was finally arrested in August 2015 (ibid).

Aḥmad al-Asīr offered two reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” The first was given in an interview with the newspaper al-Jumhūriyya and the second one took the form of a big protest he staged in downtown Beirut, as a competing reaction to the protests organized by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement. Overall, these two reactions showed a strong effort on his behalf to appear to be a moderate and charismatic leader, not only for the Sunni community, but potentially also for the whole of Lebanon.

In his interview with the newspaper al-Jumhūriyya, his condemnation of the video addressed the issue of a multi-religious Lebanon while also taking the form of a criticism of Hezbollah. According to Aḥmad al-Asīr, “The Innocence of Muslims” aimed to create ‘strife between Christians and Muslims.’677 In addition, he praised the pope’s visit, which he considered to be of great benefit to the Christians – ‘our Christian brothers and partners’ – and for the Lebanese in general. At the same time, however, he criticized Hezbollah harshly, stating that the video ‘offends Muslims, whether Sunni or Shia.’ In particular, al-Asīr criticised Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh’s call for protests through which he established himself as the leader of all Muslims. He also criticised the secretary general’s assertion that the video constituted a greater threat than the burning of the al-Aqṣā mosque in 1960 and recalled the involvement of Hezbollah in Syria: ‘the shaykh of the mosques, the churches [Naṣr Allāh] destroys in Syria, and the children he strips of their skin.’ In contrast, Aḥmad al-Asīr asserted that he had been the first leader to call for protests but that he had postponed them because of the pope’s visit. In addition, he strongly condemned the violent clashes in Tripoli.

Aḥmad al-Asīr’s sit-in took place on Friday, 21 September 2012, from 3 to 8pm, in the Square of Martyrs in downtown Beirut.678 The high-ranking participants were ʿUmar Bakrī, the former singer Faḍl Shākir, and a representative of the “Free Christians,” the journalist Farīd Dukkān.679 In another article, al-Nahār presented Farīd Dukkān as the leader of the organization “Free Christian Youth.”680 Faḍl Shākir was a famous Palestinian singer who turned to Salafi

Islam and eventually gave up singing. This was announced in late September 2012 (ibid). This shows that Aḥmad al-Asīr was not able to attract any high-ranking Christian actors. In addition, people according to the organizers, the sit-in attracted some three thousand including Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians from the refugee camp ‘Ayn al-Ḥilwa in Sidon. According to al-Nahār, there were two types of participants; those who came by bus from Sidon as well as young people from Beirut and other regions. In addition, there were also women, some of them reportedly wearing ‘mini-jupe.’ According to al-Nahār, this was the first protest by the supporters of al-Asīr in six months. They carried the Palestinian and the Turkish flags, as well as the Islamic black flags and the flag of the Syrian revolution, and the flag of the Future Movement and of al-jamā‘a al-islāmiyya. Furthermore, one photo published by Saida Online showed two women in t-shirts carrying a banner stating ‘If I were Christian, I would rely on you, Muhammad, but I am Muslim and I love you…’ with grammatical errors. On stage, there was a huge banner which stated ‘Zionism is the enemy of Islam.’ According to al-Nahār, most of the youth participating did so primarily in reaction to Hezbollah’s protests in order to state: ‘We Sunnis are also here.’

The speeches given by Aḥmad al-Asīr and Farīd Dukkān will now be analysed. Like Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh, Aḥmad al-Asīr made use of rhetoric devices to present himself as a charismatic leader. He sometimes switched to dialect and tried to animate the audience, who interrupted his speech a few times with cries such as ‘Omar, Omar’ and ‘lā ilāha illā llāhu.’ In addition, Aḥmad al-Asīr sometimes appeared to be acting theatrically, suddenly switching from smiling to an angry mood. To some extent, al-Asīr’s attempts appear to have failed, as,
following the call for prayer, he continued his speech although many people had already left the sit-in (YouTube 22 September 2012).

In addition, he attempted to present himself as a national leader. Firstly, he greeted those who had come from Sunni areas like Tripoli, ‘Akkār, Wādī Khālid (in the ‘Akkār region), and al-Biqāʿ (YouTube 22 September 2012). Secondly, he stated ‘We thank you without distinction: women, men, shuyūkh, children, Christians, members of the media, and the security forces.’ Then he condemned the video as ‘those offenses’ committed by ‘a small group that only represents itself’ and by ‘extremist associations.’ Thus, he did not mention the Coptic involvement but instead connected it to ‘criminal Zionism’ (ibid). In addition, he described countries that allowed such “offenses” as extremist and also mentioned the French cartoons (YouTube 22 September 2012). Subsequently, he mentioned the good Christian-Muslim relations and praised the condemnations issued by a number of Christian actors: ‘At the head, Christians in Lebanon and, at the top, the respected president of the Republic [applause, screams and whistling] because he was the first to condemn (the video), and, at the top, the leader of the Christian Church in Lebanon, Patriarch al-Rāʾī’ (YouTube 22 September 2012). Then, Ahmad al-Asir gradually began to increase his criticism of Hezbollah. He stated: Anyone ‘who offends Ibrahim is not a Muslim, anyone who offends […] Mūsā (PBUH) is not a Muslim, anyone who offends […] Maryam and ‘Īsā, peace be upon him, is not a Muslim. Equally, anyone who offends our prophet is not a Muslim’ (YouTube 22 September 2012), and added: ‘Those who offend the family of the prophet, especially ‘Āʾisha, offend the prophet.’

This latter sentence is directed explicitly at the Shia who have a dispute with ‘Āʾisha. Then he pointed the finger at Iran, saying its interests coincided with those of the United States in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. He particularly condemned the display of photographs of Bashshār al-Asad at Hezbollah’s and the Amal Movement’s protests which allegedly constituted an ‘offense’ against Muhammad. He went on to condemn the violent clashes in Tripoli, also mentioning the attack on a KFC in Nabatieh (YouTube 22 September 2012).

Farid Dukkān also gave a short speech. Al-Akhbār describes him as a Christian journalist. In his speech, he began, ‘Oh (you) free of the free’ ‘we as Christian and Muslim Lebanese of different social and political affiliations’ and condemned the ‘offensive film “The
Innocence of Muslims.” He considered it ‘not only violating religion, but the very essence of the human being.’ He did not mention a specific background to the film, referring only ‘to (those) who want to sow strife between Christians and Muslims,’ he stated: ‘we all defend the revealed religions.’ His argument that ‘the religion of Christ condemns the offense of the other, especially of the Islamic religion’ is particularly interesting. In addition, he asserted that ‘the freedom of speech, of action, and creed are international basic freedoms.’ He called on the ‘leaders of the Lebanese communities to hold a spiritual summit and form a legal group’ that would formulate a law and submit it to the United Nations. This generally rather moderate speech is concluded by an idea drawn from al-Asīr that the war in Syria constitutes a greater threat.

In his reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims,” Ahmad al-Asīr tried to establish himself as a Lebanese leader. In doing so, he tried to counter the monopoly Hezbollah has on the defence of Islam and tried to appear accommodating towards Christians.

3.5.1.2 ‘Umar Bakrī

On 19 September 2012, al-Akhbār reported that the Islamist preacher and agitator ‘Umar Bakrī (Omar Bakri) asked Muslims to support a fatwā that would make it ‘legitimate to kill those who have insulted the prophet Muhammad.’ He also expressed his opposition to protests that would only cause harm, but stated that the video demanded a ‘strong response.’

3.5.1.3 Māhir Ḥammūd

The Islamist leader Māhir Ḥammūd made two declarations concerning “The Innocence of Muslims” and another one concerning the visit of Benedict XVI. Māhir Ḥammūd is a liberal Islamist (Rougier 2004, 125). He descends from a famous religious family in Sidon and preaches in the al-Quds mosque there (Rougier 2007, 153). He maintained a small militia during the Civil War (Rougier 2004, 226). According to Bernard Rougier, he was one of Hezbollah’s first supporters and had previously been a founding member of tājammū al-‘ulamā’ al-muslimīn (see further below, Section 3.5.14).

On 17 September 2012, Māhir Ḥammūd condemned the video on television as ‘the film offending Islam’ and ‘these acts, perversions, and lies.’ He considered it an opportunity for Muslims to unite and reminded them that they should not remain silent. In this regard, he evoked the...
the same idea as Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh, i.e. no reaction would signal ‘we allow others to exceed our creeds.’ During this TV appearance, he also repeated his idea that Benedict XVI’s visit was very important, as it fostered Christian-Muslim relations, something even more important in the context of the ‘Christian crisis of fear of the spread of Islamic thought.’

Moreover, on September 22, L’Orient le Jour reported that during his Friday sermon, Ḥammūd expressed his support for a fatwā that would allow the murder of those who had participated in the production of the video. According to the newspaper, roughly three hundred people listened to his sermon.

Finally, Ḥammūd’s analysis of Christian-Muslim relations given on the occasion of Benedict XVI’s visit should also be mentioned here. According to Ḥammūd, Islam has ‘textually and historically’ fostered relations between Muslims and Christians, whom he called ‘ahl al-kitāb and al-naṣārā, in accordance with their Islamic historical designation.’ Interestingly, this first quotation shows that Ḥammūd was aware that these terms are Islamic and not part of the Arab Christian wording. In particular, he referred to the pact between Caliph ‘Umar and Patriarch Sophronius to establish the foundation for these relations. At the same time, Māhir Ḥammūd defined Europe as a counter-model because of the religious persecutions that took place and the Frankish wars’ (crusade wars). In this regard, he praised John Paul II’s apology for ‘what happened in the history of the church’ and the ‘offenses of the church.’ Thus, he seemed to equate the church with Europe and the West. In contrast, he established the paradigm of a golden age, as he stated that any examples of persecution in the history of Islam had nothing to with Islam, but rather were the result of ‘followers of the other religions.’ As a result, these foundations do not only prove the good relations in the past but also in the future; he expressed a need to reflect on this history and realize ‘the necessity of the importance of Islamic-Christian coexistence under Islamic rule.’ Furthermore, he criticised ‘some Arab Christians’’ reliance on the West, especially criticising those who relied on Israel ‘to preserve their existence’ during the Civil War. He also strongly emphasised that all Muslim actors had welcomed Benedict XVI’s visit.

702 Al-Tawhid. 14 September 2012. الشيخ الشعار دان الفيلم المسيء للاسلام وطالب بسحبه/ الشيخ حمود: ردات الفعل الطبيعية التي طالت السفارات الامريكية في العالم العربي كانت هبة ربانية Doi: http://www.altawhid.org/2012/09/14/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7/ (retrieved May 17, 2016).
3.5.1.4 An Anti-Colonial Network against “The Innocence of Muslims”

The fourth part of this section on Islamic reactions to the video will look at the reactions of Islamic (Islamist) actors and organizations that promoted an “anti-colonial” and “anti-Zionist” understanding of the video and can be considered as leaning towards Hezbollah, at least in terms of the content of their reactions. We will start by looking at the groups and actors around the Islamic Action Front, then at tajammu’ al-‘ulamā’ al-muslimūn, then at two conferences and, lastly, at “other actors.”

To start with, we will look at the reactions displayed by the Islamic Action Front, liqā’ al-jamʿiyyat wa l-shakhsiyyāt al-islāmiyya, shaykh Sharīf Tawtū, ḥarakat al-tawḥīd al-islāmī, and tayyār al-fajr.

The Islamic Action Front (jabhat al-‘amal al-islāmī) is an offshoot of the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood, al-jamāʿa al-islāmiyya, and was established by Fatḥī Yakan in 2006 in the wake of the war against Israel. Fatḥī Yakan was born in 1933 in Tripoli and was a leading figure during the emergence of the Islamist movement in Lebanon.704 In the 1990s, he was a member of the Lebanese parliament (ibid). As shown above (see Section 3.2.2), however, he increasingly opposed the strategic and political choices made by the Future Movement and the March 14 Alliance and therefore established the Islamic Action Front. On the one hand, this gathering tends to sympathise with Hezbollah’s ideas and has strongly opposed the March 14 Alliance’s increasing enmity towards Hezbollah. On the other hand, however, the establishment of the Islamic Action Front was also an effort to contend with Hezbollah’s monopoly over the Islamic discourse of resistance (see Gervais 2012, 128). These ideas are shared by the Gathering of Islamic Associations and Personalities (liqā’ al-jamʿiyyat wa l-shakhsiyyāt al-islāmiyya), which stated that Syria would soon win against the ‘international terrorist conspiracy’ and against the ‘plans to divide our region.’705 In addition, tayyār al-fajr (“Stream of Dawn”) has cooperated with the Islamic Action Front in recent years and was founded in the wake of the Israeli occupation of Sidon in 1985. Fatḥī Yakan established the Islamic Action Front in cooperation with leading Islamic figures of the ḥarakat al-tawḥīd al-islāmī; shaykh ‘Abd al-Nāṣir Jibrī, leader of ḥarakat al-umma; and tayyār al-fajr.

On September 13, *al-Tawḥīd* published a joint statement by the Islamic Action Front and *liqāʾ al-jamʿiyyāt wa l-shakhṣiyyāt al-islāmiyya*. The statement mentioned the involvement of ‘Terry Jones and Jewish and Coptic extremists.’ However, the two organizations ascribed the actual responsibility for the film to the United States, in particular to ‘the evil US Administration which is directly responsible for the film offending and shaming the prophet of Islam, our Lord Muhammad (PBUH).’ The United States was also made responsible for having supported and protected the film, which allegedly affected 1.5 billion Muslims. In addition, the Islamic Action Front and *liqāʾ al-jamʿiyyāt wa l-shakhṣiyyāt al-islāmiyya* directly called out the US for its reported double standards, denouncing it for allegedly caring about freedom, justice, and stability in the Muslim world but staging wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon in 2006. It reminded the US ‘despite your absolute support for this Zionist monster,’ Israel lost the war against Lebanon (so it alleges).

On the following day, 14 September 2012, *al-Tawḥīd* published the reaction of a leading member of the Islamic Action Front, shaykh Sharīf Tawtūyū, who is also a member of *ḥarakat al-tawḥīd al-islāmī*. Sharīf Tawtūyū called the video ‘the shameful and offending film which violates and assaults Islam and the prophet Muhammad (PBUH),’ made by ‘fascist Jews’ and ‘some extremist Copts.’ He connected the video to the massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps of Shubra and Shatila in 1982. Like the previous statement, Sharīf Tawtūyū clearly ascribed responsibility to the United States. Besides being described as an “offense,” the video was also accused of lacking any consideration for the ‘feelings and emotions of 1.5 billion Muslims.’ Interestingly, Sharīf Tawtūyū also placed the video in the context of a violation of the ‘freedom of creed, the freedom to practice religious rituals.’ As mentioned above, Tawtūyū also saw a connection between this video and the thirtieth anniversary of the massacre of Shubra and Shatila, framing it as an example of ‘a total military, security, political, media, ideological, and propaganda war against Islam, its symbols, and Muslims.’ Sharīf Tawtūyū also participated in a conference in Beirut on 18 September 2012 (see below).

With regards to *ḥarakat al-tawḥīd al-islāmī*, its reaction was published on 13 September 2012 on Hezbollah’s website. The organization strongly condemned the ‘film’ ‘produced by Americans and extremist Copts and funded by Zionism.’ It called on Muslims to turn the

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706 Al-Tawhid. 13 September 2012. *والمسيحية* لبنان: سلسلة واسعة من المواقف المنددة من الأحزاب والجمعيات والشخصيات الإسلامية والمسيحية والوطنية بالاساءة للنبي محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم

707 "هناك حرباً عسكرية وأمنية واقتصادية وسياسية وإعلامية ومعنوية ودعائية شاملة ضد الإسلام ورموزه وعديد المسلمين.


coming Friday, September 14, into a ‘day of anger’ and protests. Ḥarakat al-tawḥīd al-islāmī was founded in 1982 around the Sunni shaykh Sa‘īd Sha‘bān in Tripoli (Mervin 2008, 81) and was one of the main militias in the city during the Civil War (Rougier 2007, 45).

The statement by liqāʾ al-jamʿ iyyāt wa l-shakhṣiyāt al-islāmīyya was published on 17 September 2012 on al-Tawḥīd. Together with “The Innocence of Muslims,” defined as ‘this film of strife,’ the statement also condemned the publication of cartoons by Charlie Hebdo. Both are viewed as ‘an open and dangerous enemy against our Arabic and Islamic community’ and as ‘a new war and a crusade(-like) attack.’ They are also accused of targeting ‘the creed, the banner and the faith of more than 1.5 billion Muslims in the world.’ Like Sharīf Tawtyū, liqāʾ al-jamʿ iyyāt wa l-shakhṣiyāt al-islāmīyya criticised the video and the cartoons within the framework of their own understanding of human rights. Firstly, the statement stated that ‘responsible freedom does not assault and does not expose the prophets, the messengers of God and the messages revealed.’ In this regard, ‘freedom of creed (ḥurriyat al-muʿtaqad)’ is viewed as the most ‘simple’ and basic human right. Thus, “responsible freedom” does not ‘attack its boundaries and does not expose the simplest human right’, i.e. “freedom of creed.”

Tayyār al-fajr’s statement, published on 20 September 2012 on al-Tawḥīd mostly condemned the so called double standards of the United States and France. Both countries are accused of having taken a position of ‘attacking the Islamic religion and its prophet without any consideration for human rights, the human being, and dogmatic and religious freedoms.’ Thus it called on France to change this and to free the prisoner George Abdullah.

This paragraph will look at the reactions issued by tajamʿ al-ʿulāmāʾ al-muslimīn; shaykh Muṣṭafā Malaṣṣ; shaykh ‘Abd al-Nāṣir Jibrī, the leader of ḥarakat al-umma and also at two conferences; one at ḥarakat al-umma’s headquarters and the other organized by tajamʿ al-ʿulāmāʾ al-muslimīn.

Tajamʿu’ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn is another important organization that gathers together those Sunni and Shia ‘ʿulamāʾ who agree with imām Rūḥ Allāh Khomaynī (Mervin 2008, 81). It was established in 1982 by the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon in order to benefit religious leaders and to reduce the Sunni-Shia divide (Rougier 2007, 32). During its meeting with the vice president of the Higher Islamic Shia Council, ‘Abd al-Amīr Qabalān, tajamʿu’ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn defined itself as part of the “Axis of Resistance”713 and as continuing

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711 Al-Tawḥīd. 17 September 2012.
712 Al-Tawḥīd. 20 September 2012.
713 Tajamo. 13 September 2012.

Mūsā al-Šadr’s efforts for national unity. It also expressed its goal of working towards Islamic unity and unity between Muslims and Christians. This section also comprises the reaction from shaykh Muṣṭafā Malassa, a member of tajammuʿ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn and director of Sharia institute in Minieh (al-Miniyya) in the Ṭakrār. In an article in April 2015 he asserted that Sunni and Shia agreed on basic principles and differ only on non-essential matters. They should therefore be qualified as two different ‘parties’ rather than as two different madhhab (ibid). Yet he questioned why the Sunni would not commemorate Ashura (ʻāšūrā’) as it commemorates a historical event aimed at reforming the Islamic community and fighting corruption (ibid).

On September 13 al-Tawḥīd published a statement by tajammuʿ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn in which it condemned the video but immediately placed it in the context of “Zionist enmity.” It explained the reason for this video by claiming ‘it is known that the Zionist creature lives its last days.’ As a result, “Zionism” is said to try to ‘offend Islam as a religion and as moral values’ by any means and is targeting ‘the head of Islam through its symbols, its thoughts, its Sharia law, its creed, and its concepts.’ In addition, the video’s background was directly connected to this theory, as the statement discussed the responsibility of Sam Bacile, an ‘Israeli-American’ and his report of having gathered five million dollars from one hundred Jews. The statement added that if Muslims united to ‘liberate Palestine,’ then the days of this ‘Zionist creature’ would indeed be numbered and criticised certain leading actors in particular; ‘Where are the Arabs, the Muslims, Islamic Cooperation? They came together to make war on Syria.’ In addition, tajammuʿ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn implicitly condemned the violent reactions in the Muslim world through its call for ‘peaceful’ reactions. Yet it also made the United States responsible for this violence as well as for the video. Lastly, the organization praised Benedict XVI’s position and ‘especially (the position) of a number of Christian religious leaders.’ The recurrent argument put forward by Christian actors, namely that this constituted an offense against Christianity itself, is understood in this statement as the Christian awareness of ‘Zionism’s’ targeting of ‘religions and, at the head, Lord Christ (peace upon him) and the Christian churches.’

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716 (http://alsheikhmustaphamalas.blogspot.co.at/ accessed 4 February 2016).
718 Al-Tawḥīd. 13 September 2012. لبنان : سلسلة واسعة من المواقف المنددة من الأحزاب والجمعيات والشخصيات الإسلامية والمسيحية والوطنية بالسياق النبي محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم.
The primary focus of shaykh Muṣṭafā Malaṣṣ’s sermon given in a mosque in Minieh, ‘Akkār, seemed to have been Benedict XVI’s visit. He considered the visit a call by the pope for ‘peace, tolerance, love, renunciation of violence, a call to coexistence, and (for) respect of the other.’ According to Malaṣṣ, these concepts are likewise shared by Islam. Therefore, he concluded: ‘that is why the Nazarenes [al-naṣārā] are the closest to those who believe in God’, i.e. the Muslims. This statement paraphrases the Quran:

*You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with Allah; and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, “We are Christians.” That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.*

It is within this Quranic context of a connection between Muslims and Christians on the one hand, and of an “enmity” of the Jews towards Muslims that “The Innocence of Muslims” is analysed. Muṣṭafā Malaṣṣ condemned the video as ‘this cowardly and condemned film,’ ‘the attack that plants hatred between the communities (umma) and the people.’ All this reportedly took place under the leadership of ‘worldwide Zionism.’ The preacher offered ‘proof’ of this assumption by referring to Quran 5:64:

*And the Jews say, “The hand of Allah is chained.” Chained are their hands, and cursed are they for what they say. Rather, both His hands are extended; He spends however He wills. And that which has been revealed to you from your Lord will surely increase many of them in transgression and disbelief. And We have cast among them animosity and hatred until the Day of Resurrection. Every time they kindled the fire of war [against you], Allah extinguished it. And they strive throughout the land [causing] corruption, and Allah does not like corrupters.*

Seemingly, Muṣṭafā Malaṣṣ did not differentiate between the Jews of the Quran and “Zionism.” Yet later on in his sermon, he also ascribed a responsibility for this video to the United States. Subsequently, Muṣṭafā Malaṣṣ dwelt on the violent reactions he considers one of the goals of the video. He called on Muslims to remain within the ethics of Islam; ‘Although America commits the ugliest crimes against our community, this must not lead us to reactions that contradict with what our religion has commanded us.’ Thus, Muslims need to comply with the peaceful rules of Islam when being attacked, because ‘this is the difference between the revealed human being and the slave of its lusts [in] the materialistic civilization.’ As a result, throughout his speech, Muṣṭafā Malaṣṣ elaborated the complex image of the “other” as Zionist, Quranic Jewish, materialist, Western; basically, as everything that the Muslim is not.

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719 Al-Tawhid. 14 September 2012.
In a short statement of reaction published on 13 September 2012, shaykh ‘Abd al-Nāṣir Jibrī, the secretary general of ḥarakat al-umma condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” for ‘targeting the holiest of sacred items (muqaddasāt)’ and for ‘provoking popular anger to create a conflict between the people to benefit American-Zionist control.’

‘Abd al-Nāṣir Jibrī is also the president of the College al-Dawa (Preaching College) in Beirut, which was funded by the Libyan regime (Rougier 2007, 211). In addition, he is a member of the Sufi naqshbandiya order and his spiritual guide was the late muftī of Syria (Rougier 2007, 212). In his condemnation of the video, its actual background was not mentioned at all, but instead its responsibility was ascribed to the eternal enemy, America and Zionism. ‘Abd al-Nāṣir Jibrī also praised the position of the Roman Catholic Church on this issue (ibid). He later participated in a conference at ḥarakat al-umma’s headquarters, and al-Tawhīd introduced him as “the general coordinator of the Islamic Action Front.”

He can be said to subscribe to the ideology of the March 8 Alliance; in reaction to the execution of the Shia scholar Nimr Bāqīr an-Nimr in January 2016, he described the Saudi scholar as a promoter of freedom of speech who was executed by a tyrannical ruler. Furthermore, Jibrī called on Saudi Arabia to stop its wars in Yemen, Libya, Syria, Iraq and, surprisingly, ‘in Palestine’ (ibid).

On 18 September 2012, al-Tawhīd reported on a conference at ḥarakat al-umma’s headquarters which gathered together liqāʾ al-jamʿiyyāt wa l-shakhṣiyyāt al-islāmiyya, ‘Abd al-Nāṣir Jibrī, and Sharīf Tawtyū, as well as ‘ulamāʾ and lay actors. In his speech, ‘Abd al-Nāṣir Jibrī called on ‘the free world, the international community, all nobles and the liberal Christians in the world’ to work on issuing a law that would forbid ‘the exposure of and attack on the messengers of God, the prophets, Islamic symbols and the messages revealed.’ In his speech, Sharīf Tawtyū mentioned both the video and the cartoons published in Charlie Hebdo. In particular, he insisted that the ‘film of strife constituted a dangerous enemy for our Islamic Arab community.’ Yet both men also demanded an ‘almighty, firm and assertive’ position from the free world.
the ‘whole community.’ In addition, he demanded the suspension of the film, and that its makers, distributor and supporter be punished using the ‘harshest punishment’ possible.

On 18 September 2012, tajammu’ al-‘ulamā’ al-muslimīn organized a conference at the headquarters of the Professional Press Association. Following speeches by a number of participants—a member of this professional association, Muḥammad Ba‘albakī; shaykh al-Zayn; shaykh Ḥāmid Qabalān; shaykh Muḥammad ’Abd al-Qaṭ; shaykh Yūsif Da‘muş; and Māhir Ḥammūd—a common statement was issued. The statement asserted that the ‘protection of the Zionist creature is […] one of the primary motivations for the offending film’ and considered it a ‘clear attempt to [produce] strife between Muslims and Christians, especially in Egypt.’ Yet, at the same time, the gathered ‘ulamā’ viewed the United States as the key figure responsible for this ‘offense against the Muslims as represented in the film offending the prophet.’ As a result, it has to bear the consequences for this offense and stop the spread of the video. In addition, the statement proposed its own definition of freedom: ‘There is a difference between the freedom of expression and the freedom to offend.’ The statement re-asserted the responsibility of ‘America and worldwide Zionism’ in an effort to divert attention from Christians; ‘there is no sin in this for our Christian brothers.’ As a result, it praised the position taken by Benedict XVI, Patriarch al-Rā‘ī, the ‘pope of the Copts in Egypt’ and other Christian clerics. It also praised the initiative of the Lebanese minister of Foreign Affairs. However, the statement criticised Islamic Cooperation’s attitude, questioning its contribution to solving the crisis in Syria.

The various speeches differed to some extent.

Muḥammad Ba‘albakī, a member of the Press Association, ascribed responsibility to Zionists: ‘the hands of the Zionist enemy [are] evident in what happened’ and described the video as a ‘conspiracy of the ugliest conspiracies’ to stir up strife between the ‘believes in God.’ Yet he conceded that ‘Muhammad is greater than the stupidity embodied in this film.’

Shaykh al-Zayn is the religious judge of Sidon, an important preacher in the city and an important leader of the Palestinians (Rougier 1997, 37). Shaykh al-Zayn likewise stated that there was no need to defend Muhammad, because God ‘honoured him.’ He attributed the video to ‘the enemies of Islam who harbour hatred in their hearts and a hatred of Islam and the Messenger of God.’ Yet, overall the speech was dominated by the call for Islamic unity which he envisioned, at least to some extent, under the banner of Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh; ‘I hope that soon

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726 Al-Tawhid. 18 September 2012.تواصل المواقف المنددة والغضب في المجتمع المدني والسياسي في لبنان جراء بث القسم المسمى بالإسلام.
we will pray in the al-Aqṣā mosque behind Hezbollah’s secretary general, his excellence, al-
sayyid Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh.’

In contrast, shaykh Āḥmad Qabalān demanded reactions in Lebanon that were ‘fit for
the Messenger of God.’ In addition, he expressed his faith in the strength of Christian-Muslim
relations: ‘What the societies of the West aspired to will not influence Islamic-Christian
coexistence because what it joins are heavenly values [that cannot be destroyed by] the devils
of the earth.’

Shaykh Muḥammad ‘abd al-Qaṭ mentioned the rivalry between the March 8 and the
March 14 Alliance, stating that ‘the prophet does not need them [these two alliances].’

Similarly, shaykh Yūsif Da’īmūsh727 placed the video in the context of the Sunni Shia
divide; ‘America strives day and night to [stir up] strife between Sunna and Shia and today, the
day has come to sow strife between Muslims and Christians.’ He considered the video an
‘American-Zionist plan for strife.’ Thus, he called for unity between Muslims and praised calls
by Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh for a law prohibiting such “offenses” (although this call did not only come
from Naṣr Allāh).

Finally, Māhir Ḥammūd called for ‘stormy reactions in Lebanon that comprise all
Muslim and Christian communities (ṭawā’if),’ centered in Bkerkē.

Although the United States were viewed as the main instigator of this video, the
reactions were framed within the context of a “Zionist enmity,” permanent and essential. In this
regard, the enmity is related to those verses in the Quran that deal negatively with Jews. There
is a confusion, demonstrated by the interchangeable use of terms, between the Quranic Jews,
the contemporary Jews, Zionism and Israel – though the latter is never explicitly mentioned.
Christians were not mentioned. The reactions focused instead on the “Zionist enemy” and
Islamic unity.

Finally, this section will look at the reactions of imam Ḥusām al-‘Īlānī, ‘alāma al-
sayyid Āḥmad Shawqī, shaykh Muḥammad bin Darwīsh Abū al-Qaṭ, and ‘Īsām ‘abd al-Qādir
Ghandūr.

Like several other actors, the imam of the al-Ghafrān mosque in Sidon, Ḥusām al-‘Īlānī,
ascribed responsibility for the video to the US Administration and considered the video to be
part of a series of “offenses” that began with the burning of a copy of the Quran by Terry

727 Yūsif Da’īmūsh is the head of tajammu’ al-ʿulamā in Jabal Ṣāmīl, a gathering of Shia scholars in Southern
Lebanon. In one instance, he stated that Iraq, where he studied, was his second homeland. (Imam Ali. 10 May
(retrieved May 17, 2016).
Jones. To some extent, he seemed to suggest a conspiracy behind the violent reactions, since he questioned why there were no peaceful reactions at US embassies.

ʻAlāma al-sayyid Ahmad Shawqī condemned the video as ‘the film offending Islam, Muslims and the messages revealed’ and as ‘not a plan of strife, but strife in its essence.’ In particular, Ahmad Shawqī placed the video in connection with the visit by Benedict XVI and called for ‘love, dialogue, and mutual benefice (maṣālaḥa).’ In addition, he praised the condemnation by the Roman Catholic Church.

Similarly, shaykh Muḥammad bin Darwīsh Abū al-Qaṭ also attributed the responsibility for “The Innocence of Muslims” to the ‘Zionist lobby’ which is ‘the shared enemy of both Muslims and Christians.’ The video allegedly aims to ‘push Muslims and Christians against each other.’

In contrast, ʻIṣām ʻAbd al-Qādir Ghandūr, leader of al-liqāʾ al-islāmī al-waḥdawī, placed the video in the context of the ‘fear of the spread of Islam’ by ‘the constant military and intellectual Western enemy.’ As a result of this fear of the ‘rightness of the Islamic creed,’ the “West” undertakes these ‘repeated attempts to distort the image of Islam.’

3.5.1.5 ʻAlī Faḍl Allāh

ʻAlī Faḍl Allāh, the son of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh, gave four reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” Like his father, who was the spiritual leader of Hezbollah, he follows a moderate Islam, close to the people, and preaches in the mosque in Birr al-ʻAbid in the southern suburb of Beirut (Mervin 2012, 345). In addition, he manages the office of the marja’ (ibid).

ʻAlī Faḍl Allāh’s first reaction to the video was published on 13 September 2012 on al-Tawḥīd and took place while he was receiving a delegation of Iranian students. He condemned the video as ‘the new attack’ on Islam and its noble prophet, ‘the offending American-Zionist film’ that displays the ‘size of hatred and enmity present in Western and...
Zionist circles for Islam and the Muslims.’ He called on Muslims to unite and to avoid ‘strife’ like that in Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. He also called for ‘civilized’ and ‘wise’ reactions. In addition, he praised the numerous condemnations by Christians he viewed as ‘another step in Islamic-Christian co-operation American-Zionist arrogance.’

In his sermon on Friday, 14 September 2012, ’Alî Faḍl Allāh discussed several subjects, among them the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims.” The video is merely alluded to in moralising terms; ‘what happened of that recent offense against the right of the Messenger of God, this offense, which is not the first and will not be the last.’ He questioned whether freedom of speech justified the offense of ‘the feelings of hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world.’ He accused the video of aiming to distort the image of Islam and to sow strife. Thus, ’Alî Faḍl Allāh’s criticism was directed particularly towards the “West” and its double standard, in particular its ‘lecturing us on the acceptance of the other, coexistence, and respecting difference.’ He equated offense against religious content with offense against the other; ‘the freedom they want is distorting the image of the other and offending him.’ He called on Muslims to unite in peaceful reactions. In addition, he expressed his hope that Benedict XVI’s visit would result in an even greater improvement in Christian-Muslim relations and an end to Christian fears which ‘have no foundation and spring from the human and revealed values the prophet Muhammad and the Lord Christ called for, the values of love, mercy, justice, and charity’ and stand united against injustice.

On 22 September 2012, al-Ḥayāt quoted him expressing the need for a ‘strategic plan on all levels,’ and stated ‘we did not see anything in the offense except Islamic-Christian strife,’ but this failed thanks to ‘the capacity of those Muslims and Christians who are aware.’

Finally, on September 24, al-Safīr published another comment by ’Alî Faḍl Allāh. This time, his condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” (and the French cartoons) took place by means of an analysis of Muhammad. In the first place, the scholar denied that either of the productions had any scientific foundation, as he stated that ‘a researcher looking for true knowledge’ in ‘his life and his sunna’ would find something completely different. Thus, Muhammad is described as ‘not an average human being, but […] a school in the building of the human being, in the past, the present and the future and […] a proof of goodness, truth, beauty, and virtue’ and improving the human being; ‘yes, producing the human being according

734 محطة أخرى من محطات اللقاء الإسلامي المسيحي في مواجهة الغطرسة الأمريكية الصهيونية
to the attributes of God.’ Faḍl Allāh enumerated Muhammad’s moral qualities – for instance, his kindness towards the poor – and concluded: ‘Muhammad himself was a prophet before becoming a messenger for the whole of humanity.’ However, Faḍl Allāh did not want to establish an *imitatio muhammadii* as Salafism does, but instead underlined *the message rather than the human being*, quoting verse 3:144: ‘Muhammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]?’ As a result, he used ‘we,’ also appearing to encompass the Christians. All in all, Faḍl Allāh did not establish a particular national, or even religious, framework. Instead he established a moral and civilizational framework: ‘We, like all the people who follow the principles and the belongings.’ An “other” is more clearly defined: ‘Why this hate? Why all this hate? We address these questions to the cartoonists of the West who always drawl slogans of humanity, connection, and globalization’ and questioned ‘Since when is producing strife a value?’ He stated ‘Our problem is not in the difference of opinion, even when it comes to the freedom of opinion. The problem between us is the non-existence of morality, values, and principles, especially when it comes to our great causes.’ Thus, the “other” is not clearly mentioned but framed in opposition to everything Muhammad as a messenger stood for. Importantly, this other is characterised by complete nihilism. To conclude, “The Innocence of Muslims” gave ‘Alī Faḍl Allāh the opportunity to insist on the moral values embodied in Islam.

**Summary of Section 3.5**

All in all, these reactions suggest a division within the Islamist stream, as al-Asīr framed his reactions in opposition to Hezbollah, and the actors mentioned in Section 3.5.1.5 were well aware of these divisions. Although many seemed to be aware of a Coptic involvement, the actual responsibility for this video was displaced towards “Zionism,” and many reactions show a strong anti-Semitic stance. Unlike Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh, who made use of to this same diversion, in these examples there is no justification provided for it. Yet, these reactions can be understood as attempts to boost the idea of resistance against Israel in Lebanon.

**3.5.2 Christian Organizations**

This section will analyse the various reactions of Christian organizations; the Maronite League, the Maronite General Council, the Orthodox Gathering, the Greek Catholic League, the Syriac League, the Gathering of Independent Christians, and the Catholic Media Centre. All these organizations, except for the last two, can be described as “sectarian,” as they defend the
political interests of their communities and are, to some extent, composed of political representatives of these communities.

The main questions regarding these organizations are related to the content and the relevance of these reactions.

**The Maronite League**

The Maronite League (al-rābiṭa al-mārūniyya) is an important Maronite organization. It was founded in 1952 and currently comprises one thousand members, among them the former presidents of Lebanon, MPs, ministers, high-ranking officials, leaders in economic and social fields, and exceptional intellectuals.\(^{738}\) It promotes a ‘free, independent, plural, and democratic Lebanon’ (ibid) as well as the preservation of ‘Lebanese heritage, Christian-Muslim dialogue, (and) the Arab culture in whose renaissance the Maronite have played such important a role.’\(^{739}\)

During the Civil War, the Maronite League attempted to reconcile the rival Maronite forces (Labévière 2009, 28) and once again played a significant role following the assassination attempt of Butrus Ḥarb in 2012.\(^{740}\) Together with the Maronite General Council (al-majlis al-ʾāmm al-mārūnī) and the Maronite Diaspora Institution, the Maronite League attempted to ease tensions between the Christian parties of the March 14 Alliance and those of the March 8 Alliance (ibid).

In a statement published on September 13, the Maronite League mentioned “The Innocence of Muslims” as its seventh point alongside several other subjects.\(^{741}\) These subjects were the pope’s visit, the measures taken by the army, Patriarch al-Rāʿī’s visit to the al-Shūf, and the economy. The video was then condemned as ‘the American film,’ the ‘offense against the Islamic religion,’ ‘a suspicious action’ undertaken by (those with) ‘malicious hands and intentions’ aiming to ‘stir up strife’ and ‘damage relations between the religions.’
The Maronite General Council

Similarly, the Maronite General Council issued a declaration that was read by the former minister Wadi‘ Khāzin.\(^{742}\) It accused the video of ‘creating a conflict between Muslims and Christians.’ “The Innocence of Muslims” was condemned as an ‘offense against the Islamic religion’ and as a ‘self-repeating phenomenon.’ The council called for a punishment on an international level similar to the one existing for Anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial.

The Orthodox Gathering

A statement from the Orthodox Gathering (\(\text{al-liqā‘ al-urthūdhuksiyya}\)) was published on 20 September 2012 on \(\text{al-Tawhīd}\).\(^{743}\) It referred to the video by its title and also mentioned the French cartoons. Both were condemned for ‘exposing the prophet of the Muslims, Muhammad.’ It attributed the video to ‘Zionism’ which allegedly aimed to ‘[stir up] a battle between Christians and Muslims, especially after the successful visit of his Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI.’ It demanded an international law prohibiting this kind of action. To a certain extent, this reaction reflects the ideas expressed by Īlī Firzlī (Section 3.2.3).

The Orthodox Gathering (\(\text{al-liqā‘ al-urthūdhuksiyya}\)) was established by leading Greek Orthodox politicians, among them Īlī Firzlī, to submit and promote a new and controversial electoral law (Noble 2013). The current electoral law dates back to 1960 and divided Lebanon into twenty-six electoral districts. The party or the candidate who reaches a relative majority, wins all the seats. In contrast, the “Orthodox Plan” proposed by the Orthodox Gathering would treat Lebanon as a single electoral district and compel voters to vote candidates of their own community.

The Greek Catholic League

The Greek Catholic League’s reaction (\(\text{rābiţat al-rūm al-kāthūlīk}\)) to the video was expressed following a meeting that concluded with the issuing of a statement. In this statement, the league dwelt at length on the visit of Benedict XVI and the importance it held for Lebanon; a ‘small country, but big in terms of the will of its sons.’\(^{744}\) It stated the country would not surrender to ‘religious extremism or strife,’ but would continue on the path of ‘love, openness,


\(^{743}\) Tawhid. 20 September 2012. سلسلة واسعة من المواقف لوزراء ورؤساء وشخصيات وهيئات وأحزاب في لبنان تندد بالفيلم 2012. والرسومات المسيئة للرسول 2012.

coexistence, and mutual respect.’ Lastly, the statement briefly mentioned the video, referring to it as ‘the big offense,’ ‘the film “The Innocence of Muslims,”’ and ‘offending the Messenger and Islam.’ Greek Catholic League sees the video as aiming to ‘distort the image of Islam and Muslims,’ provoke them, and ‘create tensions between Muslims and Christians in the world and in the Middle East’ in the context of the pope’s visit.

The Greek Catholic League was founded in 1979745 and views itself as ‘the daughter of the church;’ ‘guardians of the faith, guardians of the church, guardians of the right and truth, guardians of the historic Melkite path (malsak), guardians of society and of the nation.’746 For the 33rd anniversary of the League, the Greek Catholic Bishop of Beirut and Jbail, Kīrillus Buṭrus emphasized the non-sectarian position this community had always pursued, as it did not have a militia during the Civil War. He described this stance as follows: ‘We are for the nation first, then comes the community and then the church.’747

The Syriac League

In his condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims,” the president of the Syriac League, Ḥabīb Afrām, asserted that the belief in freedom ‘in all its dimensions does not mean the freedom to despise diversity and plurality or to be reckless with holy things of one or values.’748 Compared to the other reactions in this section, Ḥabīb Afrām did not specify the object of his condemnation, but rather made a general ethical and moral statement.

Ḥabīb Afrām can be described as the spokesman of his community, the Syriac Orthodox Christians. He founded the Syriac League (al-rābiṭa al-surīyāniyya) in 1975 because, he stated, the community was in need of a representative body.749 Yet this organization is ‘civilian, non-governmental, un-official, and not a party’ (ibid). In addition, he is also the president of the Union of Christian Leagues in Lebanon,750 which was established in 1985 and comprises the Syriac Orthodox, the Syriac Catholic, the Chaldean, the Latin, and the Protestant communities (Corm 2003, 189).

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745 Ucip Liban. 24 April 2012. Doi: http://www.ucipliban.org/%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%81%D9%8A/ (retrieved May 17, 2016).


748 Al-Liwa. 14 September 2012. ميقاتي والحريري وقيادات دينية وسياسية ندّدوا بالفيلم الأميركي المسيء للإسلام.. وبالعنف الدموي في الدفاع عن النبي.


750 Afram, Habib. 23 October 2014. Lecture at the NEST. Beirut.
The Catholic Center for Media

The Catholic Center for Media (al-markaz al- kāthūlíkī li l-i’lān), which was founded by the bishopric commission (Fleyfel 2013, 71), condemned the video, because ‘an offense against one religion is an offense against all religions.’ It called for the prohibition and removal of the “film.”

The Gathering of Independent Christians

The president of The Gathering of Independent Christians (liqāʾ al-masīḥiyīn al-mustaqmillīn), Shādī Mas’ad, also issued a brief reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims.” This party was founded in January 2012 in Harissa (Ḥarrīshā) and is inspired by the ideas of Patriarch al-Rāʿī (POC 2012, 394). Shādī Mas’ad is also the former head of Fund of Expatriates. In his reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims,” he rejected the pretence of freedom of speech and demanded the removal of the ‘film’ from internet search engines (ibid). However, he also condemned the ‘unreasonable reactions’ to the film, especially those in Tripoli (ibid).

Summary of Section 3.5.2

Interestingly, fully half of the organizations referred to “The Innocence of Muslims” as an offense against Islam, thus distinguishing it from Christianity, and viewed it as aiming to cause strife between Christians and Muslims. Only the Orthodox Gathering attributed a clear background to the video – “Zionism” – and only Shādī Mas’ad condemned the violence which followed it.

3.5.3 Organizations

This section comprises the reactions issued by the Front for Lebanese Building (jabhat al-bināʾ al-lubnānī), the National Democratic Gathering in Lebanon (al-tajammuʿ al-waṭanī al-dīmūqrāṭī fī lubnān), the Platform for National Unity (minbar al-wāḥda al-waṭanīyya), and the Popular Lebanese Conference (al-muʿtamār al-shaʿbī al-lubnānī).

The leader of the Front for Lebanese Building (jabhat al-bināʾ al-lubnānī), Zuhayr al-Khaṭīb, condemned what he referred to as ‘the dangerous crime in the production of the American film “The Innocence of Muslims”’ in a declaration published on September 18. He

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752 الصندوق المركزي للمهرجين. المزيد من المواقف الشاجبة للفيلم المسيء للاسلام. Al-Anwar. 18 September 2012.
connected it to ‘worldwide Zionism,’ but he also strongly criticized the March 14 Alliance for defending and absolving the United States (of responsibility) (ibid). The organization’s slogan is “Arabism – Resistance – Development.” Jabhat al-bināʾ al-lubnānī considers that the Syrian regime is facing a ‘takfīrī attack’ as part of a project by Israel and ‘its partners’ to divide the Middle East.

On September 17, the National Democratic Gathering in Lebanon (al-tajammu’ al-waṭani al-dimūqrāṭī fī lubnān) criticized the ‘American-Zionist film’ that aimed to ‘stir up strife between Christians and Muslims.’ It called for peaceful protests in Lebanon and for the respect for Muslim and Christian believers (ibid). This organization aims to establish a ‘civilian, democratic, modern state founded on the basis of citizenship and non-sectarianism.’ It also promotes resistance against the ‘Zionist enemy’ and unity and Arabism for Lebanon (ibid).

Under the leadership of former Prime Minister Selim Hoss (Salīm al-Ḥuṣṣ), the Platform for National Unity (minbar al-waḥda al-waṭaniyya) issued a reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims” and the Charlie Hebdo cartoons during its weekly meeting. The statement denounced France in particular for its double standards, as a country where, on the one hand, protests against the “The Innocence of Muslims” were forbidden, but where, on the other hand, the justice system ordered the French magazine Closer to remove its pictures of the topless Duchess of Cambridge (born Kate Middleton) because these pictures violated her privacy. The Platform for National Unity called on Arab and Lebanese leaders to issue a law through the UN and the Arab League forbidding this kind of offense on the international level.

Finally, the leader of the Popular Lebanese Conference (al-mu’tamar al-sha‘bī al-lubnānī), Kamāl Shāṭīlā, condemned the video for its alleged aim of creating ‘Islamic-Christian

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753 Al-Tawhid. 18 September 2012. تواصل المواقف المنددة والغضب في المجتمع المدني والسياسي في لبنان جراء بث الفيلم المسيء إلى الإسلام.


756 Al-Sahaf. 26 September. تتبني بيان بكركي الرافض للإساءة.


strife in Egypt and the world.’\textsuperscript{760} He also criticized those Islamic forces that pretended to carry
the banner of Islam but failed to do so. In addition, he welcomed Benedict XVI’s visit and stated
that ‘the preservation of the Christian existence in the Arab region and the intensification of its
role in Arab life is an obligation every follower of Arabism (‘urubiyyīn) ought to strive for.’
During the Civil War, Kamāl Shātīlā belonged to the Nasserist forces and returned to Lebanon
in 2000 after sixteen years in exile.\textsuperscript{761}

3.6 Joint Christian-Muslim Reactions

This final section will look at the joint Christian-Muslim reactions on various levels and
analyse the various means of accommodation.

3.6.1 The “Spiritual Summit”

In late September 2012, on September 24, the heads of the various different religious
communities gathered at the see of the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerké to discuss several issues,
including “The Innocence of Muslims.” Such “spiritual summits” (al-qīmam al-rūḥiyya) are an
example of the sustained efforts being undertaken by religious actors in Lebanon in recent years
to foster good interreligious relations and understanding (Hager 2016). This spiritual summit in
late September 2012 provided a very vivid illustration of these efforts.

Spiritual summits gathering together representatives of the churches and of the official
Islamic institutions take place on a regular basis, and the September 2012 summit was the fourth
since the election of Patriarch mār Bishāra Buṭrus al-Rāʾī.\textsuperscript{762} Such summits are closely linked
to the National Committee for Dialogue (al-lajna al-waṭaniyya li l-ḥīwār); the summit discussed a statement drafted by the committee and subsequently issued its official statement.

The permanent National Committee for Dialogue (al-lajna al-waṭaniyya li l-ḥīwār) was
founded following the war between Israel and Lebanon in 1993, when the representatives of all
religious communities came together in Bkerké on 2 August 1993 and decided to found a

\textsuperscript{760} Al-Tawhid. 17 September 2012.

\textsuperscript{761} Al-Bawaba. 23 September 2000. Doi:
http://www.albawaba.com/ar/%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%83%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%84%B9%D8%AF-16-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A (retrieved May 17, 2016).

permanent committee which would represent all these communities (Mokrani 2009, 509-510). The see of Bkerké was chosen because of the Maronite patriarch’s historical role in the independence of Lebanon (Mokrani 2009, 509). According to Hares Chehab (Ḥārith Shihāb), one of its two general secretaries, the committee should not to be defined as a forum of interreligious dialogue, but rather as an institution dealing with every-day matters. It meets on a regular basis and issues recommendations but these are not necessarily implemented. The other general secretary of the committee is Muḥammad Sammak. Aside from the Maronite community, Ḥārith Shihāb also cooperates with the smaller Christian Communities; the Armenian Catholic, the Protestant, the Chaldean, the Syriac Catholic, the Syriac Orthodox, the Latin, the Assyrian, and the Coptic churches. In addition, there is one representative for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, one for the Greek Catholic Melkite Patriarchate and one for the Armenian Apostolic Catholics. As for the Muslims, they are represented by one representative from the Sunni dār al-fatwā, Muḥammad Sammak; one representative from the Higher Islamic Shia Council and one representative from the Druze shaykh al-ʿaql. The Alawi sect does not have a separate representative. In addition, Ḥārith Shihāb, a lawyer by training, is the former head of the Maronite League and the current head of the Emir Shihāb family in Lebanon.

The media reported the exact procedures in this summit in depth; from the drafting of a statement in the National Committee to the issuing of a common position by the spiritual summit. On 24 September 2012, al-Nahār reported that a draft statement was discussed by the representatives in the National Committee and the two secretary-generals, Ḥārith Shihāb and Muḥammad Sammak. Subsequently, on September 23, Shihāb submitted this draft to

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765 Muhammad Sammak is a key actor in the interreligious dialogue. He was one of the signatories of the document “A Common Word Between Us and You” (see Chapter 5) and is an advisor to the muftī of Lebanon. In addition, he is a board member of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Vienna.
770 Al-Nahar. 24 September 2012. 3 عناوين في القمة الروحية اليوم و الحضور مكتمل إسلامياً. Number 24857. Year 80. Page 2. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Nahar 24 September 2012.”
Patriarch al-Rāʾī who spoke via a telephone call with the muftī, Rashid Qabbānī (al-Nahar 24 September 2012). The spiritual summit took place on September 24 and began with Ḥārith Shihāb reading the draft statement (al-Safir 25 September 2012) followed by several religious leaders delivering speeches. Overall, the media reported that the summit was very calm and harmonious and all leaders were in complete agreement (al-Safir 25 September 2012). There were only some minor changes made to the drafted statement; these were ‘linguistic’ in nature and did not change the ‘essence’ of the document (al-Safir 25 September 2012). These changes reflect a tremendous effort at rapprochement between the communities. For instance, ’Abd al-Amīr Qabalān, the vice-president of the Higher Islamic Shia Council, suggested adding a paragraph on the visit of Benedict XVI thanking him for his visit, adding that ‘Israel is the enemy of all […] because Lebanon is the place where all confessions meet and form partnerships’ and he went on to describe Bkerké as ‘place of goodness and blessing’ (al-Safir 25 September 2012). Similarly, in his speech Rashid Qabbānī emphasized the importance of this visit and underlined his solidarity with the Christians: ‘side by side with them in all their demands. We Muslims have to stand with Christians so that our rights and theirs are equal.’

Furthermore, he suggested changing the condemnation of the offense against Islam to ‘the continued and repeated offense on Lady Mary and the prophet ʿĪsā [underlined by the author]’ and also proposed establishing a committee to criminalize such offenses. In addition, the president of the Islamic Alawi Council, Shaykh Asad ʿĀṣī, praised Benedict XVI’s visit and Qabbānī’s letter to the pope (al-Safir 25 September 2012). On the Christian side, Patriarch al-Rāʾī also made considerable efforts to enable mutual understanding. In his speech, he asserted that the ‘offense’ against Muhammad was an ‘offense against Muslims and Christians.’

In addition, in a highly symbolic gesture, he allowed the Muslim representatives and delegations to pray in another room (Shihāb 2014).

Finally, the summit adopted the following position on the video “The Innocence of Muslims”:

Secondly, the condemnation of the film “The Innocence of Muslims” offending Islam, its prophet and its messenger Muhammad [underlined by the author]. The film is a lie, a defamation and a dishonesty. They [the representatives] have already condemned it individually; they insist...
that the violation of the sanctity of any religion is a violation of the sanctity of all religions. Likewise, they condemn the violent reactions that resulted in innocent victims and offended Christians and the role of worship in some countries. They appeal to the United Nations, the Security Council, the League of Arab States and to other organizations and institutions concerned to take decisions that are made without the right to exploit the right of freedom of speech, without offending religions and their holy symbols.  

Thus the statement condemned both the “offense” against Islam and the violent and anti-Christian reactions, probably in reference to Egypt. In addition, it decided on the establishment of a committee of specialised legal experts to work on a law forbidding this. It also called on the National Committee to establish the follow-up mechanisms necessary for the implementation of the spiritual summit’s recommendations. The religious representatives give a justification for these demands; common theological foundations:

The call to insist on the unity of faith in God and the working on His commandments, on His spiritual and moral values in personal, family and social life, as well as on the place and role of the human being as under God’s management.

Examining the representatives and the participants, it seems that all the communities appear to have been present except for the Greek Catholic Melkite Church. The Patriarch initially wanted to send a deputy, ʿIṣām Yūḥannā Darwīsh, but he was eventually unable to attend the summit (al-Safir 25 September 2012). According to the Maronite Patriarchate’s website, the following people participated:

- *mār* Bishāra Buṭrus al-Rāʾī, Maronite patriarch;
- *shaykh* Muḥammad Rashid Qabbānī, *mufīḥ* of Lebanon;
- *imām shaykh* ʿAbd al-Amīr Qabalān, vice-president of the High Islamic Shia Council;
- *shaykh ḥaq* Naʿīm Ḥasan, spiritual leader of the Druze;
- *shaykh Āṣād* Ḥasan, president of the Islamic Alawi Council;
- Ārām I. Kīshiyān, Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Cilicia;
- *mār* Ighnāṭiyūs Yusif III. Yūnān, patriarch of the Syriac Catholic Church;
- Reverend Dr. Salīm Ṣayhyūnī, president of the Evangelical Synod in Lebanon and Syria;


This source is to be found in Attached Documents 1.

775 Bkerki. 24 September 2012.
• Bishop Ilūsiyūs ‘Awdīh, Greek Orthodox metropolitan bishop of Beirut;
• Bishop Būlus Daḥdah, Roman Catholic apostolic vicar of Beirut;
• Mīshāl Qasārjī, patriarchal representative of the Chaldean Church, and Chaldean Bishop in Lebanon;
• George Ṣalībā, representative of the Syriac Orthodox patriarch;
• Monsignor Mūrādiyān, representative of the Armenian Catholic Patriarch;
• *al-arshimandrīt* Rūyīs, introduced by the patriarchate’s website as the representative of the Coptic Catholic Church. In fact, Rūyīs al-Awrushalaymī is actually the representative of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Lebanon and Syria;\(^{776}\)
• *al-arshimandrīt* ‘Imānu‘īl Yūḥannā, representative of the Assyrian Church.\(^{777}\)

Saлим Ṣayhyūnī was president of the Evangelical Synod in Lebanon and Syria for fifty-six years.\(^{778}\) In addition, the Syriac Catholic Patriarch, Ighnātīyūs Yūsīf III Yūnān, also participated in the spiritual summit, although the Holy Synod of the Syrian Catholic Church took place at the same time (al-Nahar 24 September 2012). All in all, al-Safīr listed more than thirty-five clerics (al-Safīr 25 September 2012). Additionally, there were also members of the National Committee for Dialogue, such as Ḥārith Shīḥāb, Kamīl Mūsā, Mīshāl Ābd, as well as the coordinator of relations between the religions in Bkerkē, Ḥādī Dāw, another representative of the Higher Islamic Shia Council, Nazīh Jmūl, Patrik Marrād for the Armenian Catholic Church, and an entire Catholic delegation.\(^{779}\)

Following the spiritual summit, the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights adopted the statement and issued another document in which it added Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,\(^{780}\) as well as Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.\(^{781}\) Its president, Mīshāl

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\(^{776}\) Al-Nahar. 29 September 2010. 
\(^{777}\) Al-Nahar. 24 September 2012. 
\(^{778}\) Al-Nahar. 30 December 2012. 
\(^{779}\) Aztag Arabic. 25 September 2012. 
\(^{780}\) "Article 10. 1. All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. 2. (a) Accused persons shall, save in exceptional circumstances, be segregated from convicted persons and shall be subject to separate treatment appropriate to their status as unconvicted persons […]" (United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner. 16 December 1966. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Doi: http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx (retrieved May 17, 2016). 
\(^{781}\) "Article 4 states: Parties condemn all propaganda and all organizations which are based on ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin, or which attempt to justify or promote racial hatred and discrimination in any form, and undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, such discrimination and, to this end, with due regard to the
ʿAbd, considered Lebanon the primary victim of ‘attacks on religions’ because of its religious heterogeneity.782

This spiritual summit vividly demonstrated the efforts made at rapprochement and mutual understanding. At the same time, there was a clear distinction made between what is Islamic and what is Christian which was expressed through the use of the respective terminology.

2.6.2 Christian-Muslim Reactions in Beirut

This section covers the gatherings organized by _tajammuʿ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn_ which brought high-ranking religious figures together, and also the (all-)female sit-in staged by members of the March 8 Alliance.

After the spiritual summit, _tajammuʿ al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn_783 invited several Islamic and Christian representatives to an “Islamic-Christian consultative meeting” to discuss the statement.784 These representatives were Father Qusṭanṭīn Naṣār, Greek Orthodox; Father Mikardīsh Kishīshiyān, Armenian Apostolic; Father Antoine ṫaw, Maronite; _shaykh_ Muḥammad Ṣafī al-Miqdād, representative of the Higher Islamic Shia Council; _shaykh_ Nazīḥ al-ʿArīḍī, representative of the Druze _shaykh al-aql_; _shaykh_ Ghāzī Ḥinīna, Māhir Mazhār and Ḥusayn Ghibrīs.785 In a common statement in which ‘we join our voices to those of the free and the noble’ (al-Nahar 27 September 2012), the participants condemned the offense and asserted that the Coptic Orthodox Church was not responsible for this video (Tajamo 26 September 2012). They praised the peaceful protests in Lebanon (Tajamo 26 September 2012), thus maintaining silence surrounding the events in Tripoli, only referring to the protests organized

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783 For information on this organization see Section 3.5.1.5.

This source is quoted in this section as “Tajamo 26 September 2012.”
by Hezbollah and Amal. In addition, they thanked Benedict XVI, whom they described as the ‘highest authority in the world for Christians’ (Tajamo 26 September 2012), Al-Azhar and, interestingly, Qom and Najaf for their positions on “The Innocence of Muslims” (al-Nahar 27 September 2012). It is interesting that the cities of Qom and Najaf were established as two additional sources of authority in Islam. The Catholic pope’s visit was described as an important opportunity for the ‘religious, Lebanese and local woven fabric (nasīj)’ (Tajamo 26 September 2012). In addition, the gathering supported the establishment of a committee to issue a law forbidding such ‘offenses’ and supported the demands of the spiritual summit (al-Nahar 27 September 2012).

On September 28 or 29, al-Nahār reported on a female sit-in protesting against “The Innocence of Muslims” that took place in downtown Beirut in front of the “UN-ESCWA” building under the slogan “Muslims and Christians defend the dignity of the prophets and the holy items (muqaddasât).” Leading female members of Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, the Marada Movement, Islamic Jihad, ḥizb aḥīd al-ʿarabī, and other Islamist movements all delivered speeches at this sit-in. This very heterogeneous union reflected the strategic partnerships within the March 8 Alliance.

As the Marada Movement had not officially reacted to “The Innocence of Muslims,” Mīrnā Zukhriyā, the movement’s representative for female issues, said in her speech that she represented Marada’s official position and that ‘fanaticism is a manifestation of ignorance.’ Shahnāz Mallāḥ, leader of the Office for Female Affairs in the Amal Movement, stated ‘we Muslims and Christians, followers of Mūsā and Ḥusayn, were against the followers of Zionism.’ The Hezbollah’s representative, Khadjīja Sūlūm, quoted Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh stating that the defense of Muhammad is the defense of ‘al-Quds, all prophets, all religions and all revealed books.’ Similarly, the representative of ḥizb al-tawhīd al-ʿarabī, Fadā Wahhāb Abū Daḡrīm, asserted that ‘Zionist thought’ aimed to cause ‘events of rifts between the […] followers of the revealed religions.’ In contrast, Umm Ashraf, a member of the female committee of Islamic Jihad, considered the video to be the ‘true face of the West uncovered’ and described Muhammad as ‘our Lord Muhammad [who] enlightened the world with justice, mercy, ethics,

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787 During the Lebanese Civil War, the Marada movement strongly opposed the Lebanese Forces and the Kataeb – nowadays part of the March 14 Alliance – that had entered into an alliance with Israel (Labévière 2009, 26). The Marada movement opposed this alliance and insisted on its belonging to the Arab world. The leader of the Marada Movement, Tony Frangié, whose family was killed by the Lebanese Forces in 1978, joined Michel Aoun’s agreement with Hezbollah (Labévière 2009, 284-285).
and values.’ In addition, in her speech, Jamāl Ḥarmiz Ghubrāyyīl lamented the production of the film with the words ‘as if what happens in the region is not enough, as if the control of terror were not enough…’ and Umm Muḥammad al-Mulūk, representing the organization al-du‘āt condemned the video for aiming to cause ‘a battle between Muslims and Christians.’

3.6.3 Christian-Muslim Reactions in the South

This section describes the gatherings organized by the (Shia) dār al-ja’farī in Tyr, the march in Nabatieh led by the head of a monastery, and a conference held in the district of Hasbaya.

Tyre

On 22 September 2012, the dār al-ja’farī in Tyr organized a cross-sectarian conference to protest against “The Innocence of Muslims.” Along with the Shia muftī of Tyre and Jabal Āmil, shaykh Ḥasan ‘Abd Allāh, this event also gathered the Maronite bishop of Tyre, Shukr Allāh Nabīl al-Ḥājj and the Sunni muftī of Tyre and its surroundings, shakhy Midrār al-Ḥabīl. In his speech, Ḥasan ‘Abd Allāh described “The Innocence of Muslims” as an attack on all religions (ibid). Similarly, the Maronite bishop considered the video an ‘offense’ and a ‘violation’ aiming to sow ‘strife between Muslims and Christians.’ He also praised the condemnations issued by Islamic and Christian institutions (ibid).

Nabatieh

On September 24, al-Liwā’ reported on a joint Christian-Muslim reaction initiated by the head of the Maronite monastery of Saint Anthony (mār Anṭūniyūs), Father Dr. Bāsīl Bāsīl, in Nabatieh (Nabāṭīya) in southern Lebanon. The abbot led a march comprising members of the monastery and the parish and also visited several Islamic institutions in the city. The Christian delegation reportedly stated that ‘any offense against Islam is an offense against Christianity, and aims at discord’ they would not permit. Subsequently, they went to Kafr Raman, met the president of the district, Kamāl Ghabrīs, and its Islamic leader, Ghālib Ḍāhir, and joined the protest organized by the district. During this protest, Father Bāsīl delivered a speech in which he asserted that ‘every violation of the noble Quran is a violation of the holy Gospel and any holy book.’ The newspaper seemed to suggest that the Maronite abbot played a leading role in this Christian-Muslim reaction.

790 Al-Liwa. 24 September 2012. مهرجان في صيدا ومسيرة في صور دفاعا عن النبي الأكرم الجماعة!؛ أن حلفاء عون من الرد على إساتذه تظهر الإسلام؟
Hasbaya

The city and administrative entity (qaḍāʾ) of Hasbaya is located in the Nabatieh province, on Mount Hermon. It has suffered greatly under Israeli occupation and is still a very heterogeneous area. For instance, the secretary general of the SSNP, Asʿad Ḫardān, is an MP for the Greek Orthodox community. Hasbaya is one of the five main areas where Druze live in Lebanon (Dana 2003, 90).

On 2 October 2012, the Committee of the Citizens of Arkoub organized a conference in the Islamic center of Hasbaya with the title “The Unity of the Community (umma) is our Weapon against the Zionist-American Conspiracy.” Its participants were Muḥammad Ḥamdan, the president of the committee; the MPs of the region; Walīd al-Ghafūr, the qaʿim maqām; ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn al-ʿĀbd Allāh, the muftī jaʿfarī of Marjayoun (Mardsch ‘Uyūn); archimandrite Mīshāl Abū Ḥaydar (representing the Greek Orthodox bishop of Sidon, Tyr and Marjayoun, Kafūrī (al-Safir 4 October 2012); Father Daniel Aoueyki; Father Ḥanna Khoury; shaykh Ḥasan Shujāʿ (USJ 2014, 263) and shaykh Jihād Ḥamad, representing muftī Ḥasan Dallī (al-Safir 4 October 2012). It can be assumed that the priests Father Daniel Aoueyki and Father Ḥanna Khoury represented the Maronite and/or the Greek Catholic Melkite community, and that shaykh Jihād Ḥamad is a Sunni or Druze representative.

In his speech, Muḥammad Ḥamdan, the president of the Committee of the Citizens of Arkoub, condemned the video as an ‘offense and exposure of Islam and Christianity,’ as ‘sources of strife (fitna), that displayed an ‘intellectual, philosophical, and strategic background that the Zionist-American alliance has’ (al-Safir 4 October 2012). The final statement condemned the video as ‘an American-Zionist attack on Islam which represents intellectual terror that spurs hate, wars, and conflicts between people’ (ibid). In addition, it criticized some governments and ‘private Arab institutions’ for their quick apology to the US (USJ 2014, 263).

These three joint Christian-Muslim reactions in Tyre, Nabatieh and Hasbaya (Arkoub) represented both higher-ranking and local initiatives. Unlike the protests organized by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement in Bint Jbail and Tyre, these initiatives showed that Christians played an equal role at the very least. Interestingly, the conference in Hasbaya insisted on the Zionist background of the video.

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792 Al-Safir. 4 October 2012. لقاء إسلامي مسيحي ضد العنصرية. Number 12300. Year 39. Page 5. In this section, this source is quoted as “al-Safir 4 October 2012.”
3.6.4 Christian-Muslim Reactions in the ‘Akkār Province

In the context of the ‘Akkār province, two joint Christian-Muslim conferences took place. This northern region is one of the poorest regions in Lebanon; it has a poverty rate of 63.3%, compared to the (mainly Christian) districts of Koura, Zghorta, Bsharre and Batroun in Mount Lebanon, where the poverty rate is 24.7% (Mouchref 2008, 1). In addition, 31% to 74% of the people over the age of ten are illiterate (Verdeil, Faour, Velut 2007, 144). In 2003 the province of ‘Akkār was created as a separate administrative entity from Tripoli in order to improve access to government services (Verdeil, Faour, Velut 2007, 25). Yet this had little impact. One of the reasons for the very high level of poverty was the increasing isolation of the region experienced throughout its history; firstly, with the creation of the state of Lebanon, the region lost its connection to the wider Syrian hinterland, and during the Civil War it was cut off from other parts of Lebanon. Prior to the war in Syria, the region relied mostly on the business of smuggling diesel, gas, cigarettes, tobacco, and food from Syria into Lebanon (Mouchref 2008, 18). Since the outbreak of the war in Syria, the province has had to come to terms with the growing influx of Syrian refugees. Overall, the problems the city of Tripoli faces are the same as those faced by ‘Akkār, but on a lower level. Unlike other regions or cities in Lebanon, ‘Akkār does not have a za‘īm, a leader (Rougier 2011, 10). However, a number of political forces have tried to fill this gap. In particular, the Future Movement, which won the largest amount of seats at the parliamentary elections in 2005 (Verdeil, Faour, Velut 2007, 19), has used the region as a human reservoir. Moreover, the region has provided the Lebanese army with a high level of casualties and has faced high rates of migration. Sunni political groups like the Future Movement and aspiring Sunni leaders like shaykh Aḥmad al-Asīr have strongly used the region that is mainly Sunni but also contains a high number of Christians and Alawis. There are a large number of Maronite, Greek Orthodox and a lower number of Melkite Christians in several districts, as well as an important proportion of Alawi in others (Verdeil, Faour, Velut 2007, 86). In an angry letter to Patriarch al-Rā‘ī, Joseph Abdallah, university professor and brother of the imprisoned George Abdallah, affirmed the strong anti-sectarian stance of this region in general and criticized the Maronite Patriarchate for its lack of support of George Abdallah’s case and its causing the people to suffer an ‘intellectual and political

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794 Al-Safir. 13 September 2011. 63% من المغاربة محرومون من التعليم … و مثلهم تحت خط الفقر 63%. Number 11985. Page 5.
blockade by the Maronite church’ as well as ‘persecution, murder, and displacement at the hands of sectarian Christian fractions.’

There were two Christian-Muslim conferences, one in Bebnine and one in Halba.

**Bebnine**

The first Christian-Muslim conference in 'Akkār took place in the Bebnine, a densely populated village (Moucherf 2008, 9) and bore the title “For the Support and the Loyalty of the Messenger of God.” There are three different, slightly conflicting reports dealing with this event. These reports are drawn from *al-Tawḥīd,*796 *al-Nahār,*797 and an article on the Future Movement’s website.798 According to *al-Tawḥīd,* the conference was organised by the village’s president, Kafāḥ Kassār, and brought together political and religious leaders from the region, like the Greek Orthodox bishop, Bāsīlīyūs Maṃṣūr, and Ilyās Jirjis, a representative of the Maronite bishop, George Bū Jūda (al-Tawhid 22 September 2012). In addition to these figures, according to *al-Nahār,* several heads of districts and towns in ‘Akkār and the Sunni muftī of northern Lebanon, Usama al-Rifā‘ī,799 participated in the conference (al-Nahar 22 September 2012). In contrast, aside from all these figures, the Future Movement’s website reported the participation of several representatives of the March 14 Alliance; the MPs of the Future Bloc, Riyāḍ Raḥīl, Mu‘īn al-Mīr ‘ībī, Khālid Zahramān, Kuθr Ḥabīb, Niḍāl Ṭū‘a ma, Qāsim ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Khāẓim al-Khayr, the former MPs Muṣṭafā Ḥāshim and Wajīḥ al-Ba’rīnī; a member of the Future Movement’s political bureau, Muhammad al-Marrād; the general coordinator of the Future Movement in ’Akkār, Khālīd Ṭah; the coordinator of the Lebanese Forces in ’Akkār, Nabil Sarkīs; and a member of *al-jamā‘a al-islāmiyya,* Muhammad Hawshar (al-Mustaqbal 23 September 2012). These people were not mentioned at all on *al-Tawḥīd,* and *al-Nahār* only mentioned that ‘political figures’ participated in the conference. As a result, it is when reading this latter report that the conference becomes a Christian-Muslim reaction under the leadership of the March 14 Alliance.

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796 *Al-Tawḥīd.* 22 September 2012. “تواصل المواقف المستنكرة للاساءة الغربية للاسلام في لبنان: أئمّة المساجد وقوى واحزاب.” This source is quoted in this section as “al-Tawhid 22 September 2012.”
798 Al-Mustaqbal. 23 September 2012. “مزيج من الحضارات والمقاتلات الممتعة بالتطاول على الإسلام.” This source is quoted in this section as “al-Mustaqbal 23 September 2012.”
799 The latter was then in conflict with Rashīd QABBāNī who forbad al-Rifā‘ī from issuing *fatwā.* In Al-Akhbar English. 16 August 2012. Lebanon’s Mufti: The Future Movement Wants My Turban.
Bishop Bāsīlyūs Maṣūr was born in Latakia (al-Lādhiqīyah) in Syria in 1962, studied at the University of Balamand, earned a doctorate from the University of Thessaloniki and was named bishop of ʿAkkār by the Holy Synod in 2008 (POC 2008, 350). In his speech delivered at this conference and quoted by al-Tawḥīd, the bishop condemned the video: ‘the film offended all religions, [both] Christianity and Islam. This is an intellectual crime,’ committed by ‘those who hate and who know neither God nor His word. They lost their humanity after they lost their faith’ (al-Tawhid 22 September 2012). Thus, he remained very vague on the background to the film and insisted instead on the unity between Christians and Muslims: ‘we are the sons of God, together on this earth.’ To some extent, Bāsīlyūs Maṣūr’s speech suggests both a criticism of the violence and an “Islamization of Christianity:” ‘yet it is our right to be angry when someone offends our prophets and our messengers [underlined by the author], but we have to be civilized in our behavior.’ This expression is either to be understood as a consequent display of solidarity with Muslims or as an example of a use of Islamic terminology when referring to Jesus Christ.

According to al-Nahār, the heads of the districts and towns and muftī al-Rifāʾī emphasized the unity between Christians and Muslims; Kafāḥ Kasār, the mayor of Bebnīne insisted on the ‘importance of the unity of the spiritual family in countering threats,’ and al-Rifāʾī insisted on the importance of unity between all ‘spiritual Christians and Islamic families.’ ʿAbduh Makhūl ʿAbduh, president of the Kobeyat district (al-Qubayāt) asserted the ‘Muslims[‘] and their Christian brothers[‘] right to be angry at the offense against their prophets and their messengers’ (al-Nahar 22 September 2012). Other mayors understood the video as targeting the Arabs; Muḥammad ʿAlī Ḥusayn, president of the Union of the Districts of the Plain of ʿAkkār, considered its aim to be the spreading of ‘disunion and strife (futun)’ in ‘our Arabic and Islamic homelands (awṭān),’ and Sājī ʿAṭṭiyya, president of the Union of Districts of al-Jūma, regarded it as a war against ‘us as Arabs,’ adding that since the Declaration of Balfour ‘we as Christians have felt that the heinous offense has targeted us’ (ibid). Finally, some, including Sājī ʿAṭṭiyya, implied a “Jewish/Zionist” background to the video (ibid). ʿAbduh Makhūl ʿAbduh condemned the video as attempts by the ‘Jews’ to sow a ‘culture of fear’ (ibid). Similarly, Aḥmad al-Mīr, president of the Union of Districts of Litoral al-Qayṭa and its Areas, asserted that ‘the Islamic-Christian rapprochement has angered the Zionist gang (ʿaṣāba)’ and has resulted in ‘racist strife (futun),’ like the ‘film’ “The Innocence of Muslims” (ibid).

In comparison, the Future Movement’s website quoted slightly different positions. It seemed that the political representatives did not give speeches, except for the state
representatives and Bishop Manṣūr. For instance, Aḥmad al-Mīr is only quoted as calling on the Lebanese government to take measures against such ‘offenses’ on an international level (al-Mustaqbal 23 September 2012). Usama al-Rifāʿī is quoted as condemning the violent reactions.

Halba

On September 22, al-Tawḥīd reported on a joint Christian-Muslim conference in Halba, in Ḥākkār with the title “This is the Noble Verse: We do not differentiate between His Messengers.” Representatives of several communities participated in this conference; Father Nāyif ʿIṣṭīfān representing of Bishop Bāsīlyūs Manṣūr; former MP Wajīh al-Bāʾīnī; shaykh Dr. Muḥammad al-Ḥasan, representing the president of Islamic endowments in Ḥākkār, and shaykh ʿIlm al-Dīn Ḥamdān, a representative of the Islamic Alawi Council; Asʿad al-Suḥmānī, presented as the representative for religious affairs at this conference, as well as leaders of the districts, and religious, political, economic, cultural, and pedagogic activists. This is the only case, except for the spiritual summit, in which a representative of the Alawis participated. In his introductory speech to the conference, Asʿad al-Suḥmānī explained that the purpose of the conference was to harshly condemn ‘the film “The Innocence of Muslims” and the cartoons offending the prophet Muhammad and Islam’ produced by ‘Zionist-American circles.’ This led him to mention the situation in the Palestinian Territories: ‘The rape of Palestine, the Judaization of Jerusalem and of the Islamic and Christian holy things,’ as well as the provoking of ‘sectarian conflicts and strife (fitna) between Muslims and Christians in order to implement the plan of the Greater Middle East.’ He also quoted the Quran: ‘And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds’ (21:107); ‘And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge’ (6:108). He conceded that it was a duty for the ‘believers’ to react, but by means of ‘the peaceful, democratic reaction far away from violence and any form of destruction.’ In addition, he called on the Arab and Islamic governments to pressure European countries and the United States into enshrining Islam in the constitution as a religion and not as a culture. It is not clear what Asʿad al-Suḥmānī meant by this demand.

In addition, Nāyif ʿIṣṭīfān, a priest, delivered Bāsīlyūs Manṣūr’s speech. Interestingly, this speech was much more elaborate than the speech Bishop Manṣūr delivered himself in
Bebnine. In addition to being a cleric, Nāyif Iṣṭifān is also a poet and a historian who has published a number of books about ʿAkkār and the Greek Orthodox diocese of ʿAkkār.801 The common theological roots suggested by Bishop Bāsīliyūs Maṣūr are elaborated more vividly in this speech: ‘The believers in God are brothers who support each other and advocate for each other when God sheds light on them and those who hate him.’ This led the priest to define a common creed:

Muslims and Christians, we believe in God, his angels and in His revelation, in the resurrection (yawm al-qiyāma). We do not distinguish in this between one and the other in any of the ways of the prophets.

Nāyif Iṣṭifān mentioned both the Christian yawm al-qiyāma and the Islamic yawm al-dīn. Again, there seems to be a strong “Islamization” of Christianity, as he refers to ‘all prophets of God.’ Interestingly, Muhammad is referred to as ‘the Messenger Muhammad, son of ‘Abd Allāh’ who ‘has presented goodness to humanity.’ This analysis establishes a sort of triangle between Muslims, Christians and God, since this speech suggests that Muslims and Christians alike revere Jesus Christ and Muhammad as prophets. He insisted on a similarity of creeds and blended out the differences. In addition, Nāyif Iṣṭifān addressed both the present audience, in whose name he spoke (‘I greet you all as one ʿAkkārī family’) and God, asking ‘God almighty to enlighten the hearts of all of us with faith in, trust and reliance on Him.’ The condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” rests upon this shared theological foundation: ‘and together, with one voice, we totally refuse these plans founded by the global Zionist institutions to assault the principle of faith in God.’ Yet, besides this alleged Zionist war on theological foundations, the priest referred to a cultural framework: ‘we as Arab Christians and as Arabs.’ Finally, he mentioned the actual subject of the conference, “The Innocence of Muslims,” although still only in vague terms; ‘this screaming and shameful insolence,’ a ‘breach of the Christian principles from the cross of our holy book.’ He demanded a UN law criminalizing this ‘offense.’

The conference’s final statement defined both the ‘film’ and the cartoons as ‘offenses’ produced by ‘Zionism’ with the goal of furthering the plan of the “Greater Middle East,” ‘strife’

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801 Al-Nahar. 23 July 2014.: Doi. http://newspaper.annahar.com/article/153796-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B1%D8%AE-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%A9%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A8-%D8%B4%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8B
and divide. Therefore, the statement called for ‘holding on to national unity and uniting/joining Arabism,’ as well as the enshrining Islam in European constitutions. However, it is unclear what is meant by this demand.

Interestingly, the Alawi representative was not reported to have delivered a speech. In addition, Nāyif Iṣṭifān’s speech suggests a strong assimilation of Islam and Christianity, insisting on the similarities and blending out the dogmatic differences.

**Summary of Section 3.6**

Overall, the joint Christian-Muslim reactions analyzed in Sections 3.6.2, 3.6.3, and 3.6.4, which came from Beirut, southern, and northern Lebanon showed that they were mainly supported by Maronites, the Greek Orthodox, and the Sunni and Shia religious institutions and only rarely by the Druze, Alawi, and other Christian communities.

This whole section has shown a discrepancy between the higher-ranking religious levels and Hezbollah’s protests on the one hand, and local Christian-Muslim reactions on the other hand, particularly in the North (3.6.4). While the spiritual summit maintained a clear distinction between what is Islamic and what is Christian and mentioned Muhammad as the prophet and messenger of Islam, local actors, especially those in northern Lebanon, displayed a high level of religious assimilation. Nāyif Iṣṭifān’s speech in particular blurred the boundaries between Islamic and Christians creeds. Local initiatives, especially those in the South and the North, displayed a strong sense of unity which was not framed in national Lebanese terms but rather seem to rest on common religious identities and values. As a result, Lebanon’s broad religious heterogeneity, which comprises various Islamic and Christian sects, is reduced to the “Christian-Muslim” partnership. In addition, this unity was very often framed against the backdrop of a common enemy, “Zionism.” The differences between northern and southern Christian-Muslim reactions may result from different histories. As mentioned in Section 3.1.2, the South suffered greatly in the Civil War and the ensuing sectarian upheavals. Importantly, local initiatives also demonstrated a strong degree of equality between Christian and Sunni Muslim actors (other minorities such as the Alawi and Druze seemed to have been sidelined).

**Conclusion to Chapter 3**

Lebanese reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” pointed to the high level of polarization in Lebanese politics, especially along an alleged Sunni-Shia divide. In this regard, the issue of this video was beneficial for some actors, especially for Hezbollah and the Salafi

٨٠٢ والرد بالمزيد من التمسك بالوحدة الوطنية والعروبة الجامعة
preacher Ahmad al-Asir. Hezbollah and its leader, Hasan Naṣr Allāh, displayed a high level of mobilization and visibility. Its mobilization against the video also represented an attempt to act as a national, cross-sectarian leader.

The case of Hezbollah displays vividly how “The Innocence of Muslims” not only offered a means of boosting one’s credentials but also an opportunity to pressure one’s political and ideological rivals. In this way, the leaders of the March 14 Alliance used this event to denounce Hezbollah’s role in Syria. While the Shia seemed to show a high level of organised and peaceful mobilisation, the Sunni displayed a lack of such mobilization by religious or political leaders with the gap being filled by marginal, unofficial actors, such as Ahmad al-Asir.

However, the Lebanese reactions also reflected the contrasting relevance of this video for the various actors. In particular, the comments from the broad range of Christian actors and institutions suggested a symbolic act of solidarity with Muslims. This solidarity could be understood as a social practice in the context of a multi-religious Lebanon. Yet these Christian actors and institutions were highly heterogeneous; ranging from churches, to the president, from Christian politicians to Christians organizations, as well as local lay and cleric actors. This heterogeneity and the ideological outlook of certain actors affected the content of the reactions. Interestingly, unlike the Coptic reactions in Egypt, Christian reactions in Lebanon demonstrated little effort to dissociate Christians in the country from “The Innocence of Muslims.”

The video was overwhelmingly condemned for being an “offense” against Islam and Muhammad. Some actors, such as Hasan Naṣr Allāh, the Amal Movement, the Druze Spiritual Council, and the Maronite Church considered it an attack on Islam, Muhammad or on all Lebanese. In some cases, the video was also seen as a proof of the hatred and anomaly of the West. Yet, it seemed that none of the actors had actually watched the video, except for the Greek Orthodox Bishop George Khudr, and none discussed its content. Overall, many actors accused the makers of the video of having produced it under the pretence of freedom of speech. Many criticised the West for its alleged double standards of promoting freedom of speech in some cases and forbidding it in other cases. As a result, many actors demanded an international law that would prohibit offenses against religion.

With regards to the goals reportedly conveyed by “The Innocence of Muslims,” the idea coined by Hasan Naṣr Allāh that the video aimed to ignite strife between Christians and Muslims was widely echoed. The Future Movement, however, accused the video of threatening the achievements of the Arab Spring, while former speaker of parliament, İlī Firzlī, viewed it
as another step in the plan to strip the Middle East of its Christians. Similar ideas were expressed by the Syrian Social National Party, Druze leader Ṭalāl Arslān, the Higher Islamic Shia Council (all those actors rather sympathise with Hezbollah), who denounced the video for its aim of dividing the region along sectarian lines.

In this regard, the alleged objectives of the video and the video itself were very often connected to Israel or “Zionism,” as the ever-present enemy. Although many actors in Lebanon were well aware of the involvement of Coptic extremists (for instance Hezbollah), the video was almost systematically framed in the context of the fight against Zionism. More important, this idea was not only put forward by Hezbollah but also by a broad range of Muslim and Christian actors on both a local and national level. This idea of a Zionist background was quite obsessively referred to and discussed. In some cases, the boundaries between Zionism, the (Quranic) Jews, and Israel were blurred. Although “the other” was often obsessively mentioned in the reactions, “we” hardly emerged at all. Only a few actors defined Lebanon as a positive counter-framework to “Zionism,” as a model of religious coexistence. This idea was most vividly expressed by the Hezbollah minister of agriculture. This omission stands in stark contrast to continuous efforts by Lebanese actors in recent years to promote the country as a model of Christian-Muslim relations (Hager 2016). However, there were some reflections on the good Christian-Muslim relations in Lebanon, even though they did not mention the country explicitly.

Still, a particularly interesting and specific aspect of the Lebanese reactions were the many and diverse joint Christian-Muslim reactions. These comprised the protests organised by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement (3.1.2), the spiritual summit (3.6.1) as well as various local initiatives (3.6.3; 3.6.4), all of which showed different modalities of religious accommodations. Hezbollah and the Amal Movement tried to promote Christian and cross-sectarian visibility and even seemed to need this Christian and Sunni visibility in order to allow them to appear as an inclusive, Lebanese actor. The inter-religious mobilisation undertaken by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement clearly showed expectations towards Christians to be part of the “anti-Zionist struggle” and to show solidarity. The efforts to promote Christian (and Sunni) visibility remained largely merely symbolic and actually reduced the status of Christian and Sunni actors that of passive bystanders.

The spiritual summit that brought together all the religious representatives of Lebanon illustrated the supreme effort to achieve mutual understanding and rapprochement. Yet, behind these efforts, the speeches and final statement clearly distinguished between Islamic and
Christian dogmatic differences. In contrast, local initiatives in southern and northern Lebanon displayed a solidarity that may have been motivated by a need to overcome the wounds of the Civil War, in particular in the case of the South. Yet compared to the protests organised by Hezbollah in Bint Jbail and Tyre, where there may have been similar motivations, these local initiatives demonstrated a high level of equality between Christian and Muslim actors. Interestingly, although the northern and southern part of Lebanon had been unevenly affected by the Israeli occupation, both local reactions displayed a recurrent obsession with Zionism. Unlike Hezbollah’s protests and the spiritual summit, the two conferences in ’Akkār pointed to a religious and dogmatic assimilation and a nearly biological unity.

Interestingly, the most telling examples of mutual assimilations were expressed by actors belonging to or close to the March 8 Alliance, i.e. Hezbollah. For instance, the Syrian Social National Party and Ïlî Firzlî mentioned Muhammad as *the* messenger and not as the messenger of Islam. Interestingly, George Khudr defined Muhammad as the “Arab prophet” or the “Arab messenger.” Similarly, Hezbollah leader Ḥasan Naṣr Allâh showed a certain limited effort to accommodate others by using the term “‘Īsā al-Masīḥ,” instead of simply referring to Jesus as a(n) (Islamic) prophet. In addition, Shia scholar and religious leader ‘Alî Fadhallâh alluded to the same values of love, mercy and justice reportedly promoted by both Jesus Christ and Muhammad.

Both within these different contexts of Christian-Muslim reactions, and overall, there were some reflections of unity between Christians and Muslims. This unity was understood in terms of shared values and a common monotheistic creed (church leaders and the spiritual summit, the Islamist actors analysed in Section 3.5.1.3). Some Muslim actors, like the Hezbollah minister of agriculture and the various “anti-colonial” Islamist actors (Section 3.5.1.3) considered this Christian-Muslim coexistence part of the resistance against Israel. Other Islamist actors viewed this coexistence in an Islamic framework, and one preacher in ’Akkār provided the only example of Christians referred to as “Nazarenes.” Interestingly, a broad range of Islamist actors demonstrated attempts to prevent backlashes against Christians.

Finally, with regards to the issue of violence in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims,” there were many more condemnations made by Christian actors in Lebanon than in the other countries analysed. Both the violent reactions and the backlashes against Christians were denounced by the churches, the president, and the Christian actors in the March 14 Alliance. In this regard, the leaders of the Lebanese Forces, *ḥizb al-katāʾib*, and the National Liberal Party all pointed to the negative impact this violence had on the image of Muslims and
Islam. Many Muslim actors likewise condemned the violence. Yet the actors of the March 8 Alliance did not mention these violent reactions at all and some Islamist actors described in Section 3.5 ascribed the responsibility to the United States or further escalated the situation.
Chapter 4: Israel and the Palestinian Territories: Palestinian National Unity in the Shadow of Israeli Occupation

Introduction

This chapter is short in comparison with the chapters on Egypt and Lebanon. It will analyse the various reactions in different political contexts; Jerusalem and the West Bank, Israel, and Gaza. There were far fewer reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” in these contexts as a whole and even fewer in the context of Gaza. However, these few Palestinian reactions are especially interesting since they did not display an official, structured and pervasive discourse on Christian-Muslim unity.

As will be shown in the part of the first section dealing with Jerusalem and the West Bank (4.1), the reactions eventually connected the video to the issue of “price-tag.” The newspaper Haaretz explained in its 5 September 2012 issue that the term “price-tag” was coined by Israeli settlers as a form of revenge for forced evacuations of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. In this article, Haaretz reported on a price-tag that had been discovered the previous day, on 4 September 2012, at the Latrun Trappist monastery. The door of the monastery had been burnt and slogans written on the walls included ‘Jesus is a monkey’ and ‘Migron.’ The term “Migron” referred to the recent evacuation of the “Migron” settlement in the West Bank. This action was condemned by Israeli political and religious leaders. In addition, Haaretz reported that since January 2012 there had been two more cases of “price-tag” targeting the Greek Orthodox Church in the Valley of the Cross as well as the Baptist church in central Jerusalem. In both cases slogans such as ‘Jesus is dead,’ ‘Death to the Christians,’ ‘Mary is a prostitute,’ and ‘Price-tag’ were found.

At first glance, the Palestinian case(s) seem to differ from Christian-Muslim relations in Lebanon and Egypt, as these relations have been rather good. The Latin priest Rafiq Khoury explained that Christian-Muslim relations in Palestine have differed from those in other countries due to several reasons. Firstly, Christian Palestinians have always considered themselves Arab Palestinian Christians and have not attempted to develop a separate ethnic identity. Secondly, in the context of the Palestinian issue, both Christians and Muslims have ‘suffered’ equally and fought equally for the re-establishment of their rights. Moreover, Father Rafiq Khoury stated that both Christians and Muslims share the same aspirations for the future, and finally, the very fact that Jesus Christ was born, and died in this land is itself an important

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consideration. In another article, Fr. Khoury further characterised the idea that Christians in Palestine have never struggled with their Arab identity as ‘non-discussable’ (Khoury 1993, 29-30). However, in recent years, there has been an increasing amount of discussion about this issue among Arab Israelis (see below).

Historically, the Christians in historic Palestine were rather homogenous, as they mainly belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church. In the nineteenth century, however, the landscape changed as many churches (re-)affirmed their hold not only on the Christian holy places but also on the Christian Palestinians themselves. In 1847 the Latin Patriarchate was re-established and during the nineteenth century several Protestant churches were founded. In addition, the Greek Catholic Melkite Church also started proselytising among Christians in Palestine (and in Transjordan). While the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was increasingly riven by a conflict between the ethnic Greek higher-ranking hierarchy and the Arab laity and lower-ranking clerics, the Latin (Roman Catholic), the Protestant, and the Melkite Churches invested heavily in education and social services. As a result, missionary and European schools were founded which meant that Christians were increasingly well educated. (Robson 2011, 25). Subsequently, these churches began to develop a genuine Arab and Palestinian identity, something the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has still not achieved today.

As a consequence, in the West Bank today, the Greek Orthodox constitute a slight majority of 51% of Christians (Kårtveit 2014, 115). In contrast, in Israel, the Melkite are the largest group of Christians (Fleyfel 2013, 136). Yet the number of Christians in all of the West Bank, Israel, and Gaza has dropped dramatically over the last few decades. While they represented 8-10% of the population at the beginning of the twentieth century (Mansour 2012) this proportion has now decreased to 1.2% in the Palestinian Territories and 2% in Israel (Heyberger 2013, 15-17). According to Mitri Raheb, the actual figure is even lower, as Palestinian Christians in Israel actually represent only 1.2% of the population (Raheb 2012, 13). It is noteworthy that the figures for Israel are not representative, since there are many Christian Russians, Christian Zionists, (Fleyfel 2013, 138) and migrants amongst Israeli Christians.

The reasons for this fall in the proportion of Christians both in the Palestinian Territories and in Israel are the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, emigration, and lower birth rates amongst Christians (Mansour 2012). The nakba in 1948 affected the Christian Palestinians particularly badly, as one third were expelled. In Jerusalem, nearly half of the Christian inhabitants were expelled or emigrated (Robson 2011, 161). Marie-Armelle Beaulieu, chief editor of the
Franciscan *Magazine Terre Sainte*, placed particular emphasis on the economic and political situation, the occupation, and isolation in explaining the high rates of emigration.805

Before analysing the historical developments and, more specifically, the current situation in the West Bank, Israel, and Gaza, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the various churches. The former Latin patriarch, Michel Sabbah (Mīshīl Ṣabbāḥ), has listed thirteen churches in the Holy Land. The first of these is the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, whose jurisdiction stretches over the Palestinian Territories, Israel, Jordan, and Mount Sinai (Sabbah 2005, 35). The jurisdiction of the Latin Patriarchate also comprises these three countries – excluding Mount Sinai – as well as Cyprus (ibid). The third patriarch in Jerusalem is the Armenian Apostolic patriarch (ibid). Moreover, the Greek Catholic Church, the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Anglican Church, and the Lutheran Church all also have one patriarchal vicar or bishop for the Holy Land (ibid). Finally, there is the Custody of the Holy Land, which has represented the Roman Catholic Church in Palestine since the end of the Crusades and has continued to exist alongside the re-established Latin Patriarchate.

The case of historic Palestine is particularly interesting as it shows the absence of a historic development of sectarianism. For instance, Palestine was not affected by the sectarian clashes taking place in Mount Lebanon and Damascus in the mid-nineteenth century. Some tensions did arise in major cities such as Nablus, where the Ottoman reforms were implemented, but they were far less devastating than in Ottoman Syria (Robson 2011, 11-15). Laura Robson does note, however, that the British mandate adopted a sectarian approach in dealing with Palestine: In 1921 it created a Supreme Muslim Council, despite the fact that Muslims had never before been considered a *millet*, as their institutions were part of the state (Robson 2011, 57-58).

Christian Palestinians have been vocal actors in the struggle against Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state since the end of the nineteenth century. In this regard, the churches have increasingly come to play an important role.

In Israel, so-called Arab Israelis or in Arabic “Palestinians from inside the Green Line” (Mansour 2012, 21-23) now represent 20% of the population.806 They are the descendants of

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805 Beaulieu, Marie-Armelle. 23 March 2015. Personal Interview. Jerusalem. This source is quoted in this chapter as “Beaulieu 23 March 2015.”

those Palestinians who remained or who were able to return to their homes after 1948. The Palestinian writer Elias Sanbar described these Palestinians as being the most cut off from their ‘patrie,’ and as facing ‘démantèlement social, poursuite des expulsions, dépossession, exil intérieur, et opprobre de leurs frères’ (Sanbar 2004, 233). Firstly, following the nakba in 1948, existing social structures were completely crushed, particularly in the case of the Muslims, whereas the clerical structures in place among the Christians and the Druze managed to survive (Louër 2007, 19). In addition, Islamic Endowments were confiscated and the Supreme Muslim Council, which had managed the affairs of the community, was abolished and its leadership sent into exile (ibid).

The Israeli Arab community in Israel has faced not only discrimination but also attempts at dividing it. From 1948 to 1966 it was subjected to military rule and arbitrary detention (Louër 2007, 2). Furthermore, while more than 6,000 Jewish municipalities have been founded since 1948, not a single Arab community has been founded in this time. However, in the 1970s, an Arab Israeli political activism slowly began to emerge and was initially dominated by a leftist outlook. In 1977 the Israeli Communist Party established “Hadash,” the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (al-jabha al-dīmūqrāṭiyya li l-salām wa al-musāwāt), to create ‘a political alternative to the government’s policy of occupation and exploitation,’ and counter a ‘system of institutionalised racism and discrimination.’ The movement promotes a leftist mindset, as it demands social justice and opposes privatisation (ibid). In addition, it strongly promotes the rights of Israeli Arabs and the establishment of a Palestinian state (ibid). It has become the most important Arab Israeli party, as will be shown in this chapter, and is one of the strongest and most important parties in the Knesset. Alongside this movement, a contrasting Islamist stream also began to emerge amongst Palestinians in Israel. The “Islamic Movement inside Palestine” (al-ḥaraka al-islāmiyya fī l-dākhil al-filasṭīnī) was founded in 1971 by ʿAbd Allāh Nimar Darwīsh as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the 1980s it briefly resorted to violence but since then the Islamic Movement has focused on politics, education services, and preaching (Hroub 2000, 140). Subsequently, however, the movement has split into a more accommodating southern branch and a more radical northern branch (ibid). The northern branch

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stopped participating in municipal politics in 2003.\textsuperscript{811} Khaled Hroub credits the movement with having awakened and intensified Palestinian nationalism amongst Arab Israelis (Hroub 2000, 129).

Lauren Louër asserts that the Israeli government prefers to deal with a number of ethnic groups individually rather than with one single Arab minority (Louër 2007, 12). It is within this “sectarian approach” that several decisions taken by the Israeli government have been denounced by Palestinian actors. In particular, two measures affecting Christian Palestinians living in Israel have been seen as measures which aim to cause divisions between Christians and Muslims. The first measure is the possibility for young Christian Arabs to complete military service in the IDF, while Arab Muslims do not have to. Haaretz reported in 2005 that the number of Christian volunteers had increased in recent years, although they still only represented 0.1% of all conscripts.\textsuperscript{812} In contrast, it is currently obligatory for the Druze and the Circassians (although the latter are Sunnis) to enlist in the IDF.\textsuperscript{813} However, the Churches have heavily opposed such initiatives. For instance, the Commission for Justice and Peace of the Roman Catholic Church has accused the Israeli government of aiming to increasingly ‘Israelise the Arabs, divide them into further communities; Muslims, Druze, Christians, Bedouins’ and stated that having the option to complete military service does not reduce discrimination against Christian Israeli Arabs (POC 2014, 167-169). The second measure that created uproar among the Palestinian leadership was the decision taken by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior to recognize an “Aramaic identity.”\textsuperscript{814} Thus, Christian Israeli Arabs no longer need to register as “Arabs” but as “Arameans” instead. On both issues, the Greek Orthodox priest Gabriel Naddaf (Gabriel Naddāf) has been very vocal in his support of the Israeli government’s decisions. He was eventually suspended in May 2014 by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate due to his repeated calls on young Christians to enlist in the IDF.\textsuperscript{815} Interestingly, the Holy Synod announced that this decision was made in cooperation with King Abdullah II and the


\textsuperscript{813} Haaretz. 28 February 2012. Muslims and Christians Must Also Serve in IDF. Doi: http://www.haaretz.com/muslims-and-christians-must-also-serve-in-idf-1.415273 (retrieved May 16, 2016).


President of the PA, Mahmoud Abbas (Maḥmūd ʿAbbās) (ibid). Yet Fr. Gabriel Naddaf has continued his activism and actively supported the recognition of the Aramaic nationality in cooperation with the Maronite Shadi Halul.816

Interestingly, while the Commission for Justice and Peace deplored the loss of identity among Christian Arab Israelis, especially in mixed cities (POC 2014, 167-169) it is only in recent decades that the Arab Israelis have started to openly emphasise their Palestinian identity and belonging. In 2000 they contributed to the second intifada with a dozen “martyrs” (Louër 2007, 1) and protested against the Israeli airstrikes on Gaza in the summer of 2014.817

Finally, some of the events of recent years would seem to suggest that interreligious tensions are growing. One main event was the discussion concerning the construction of the Shihāb al-Din mosque in Nazareth just in front of the Church of the Nativity. However, over the last few decades, the demographic structure of the city has been completely overhauled. Twenty-five years ago Christians constituted a majority of 70%; nowadays they only represent a minority of 30%.818 In addition, in the context of the crisis surrounding the Shihāb al-din mosque, the Israeli government has tended to appear biased and thus contributed to an increase in interreligious tension in the city (see Tsimhoni 2010, 220).

Following the war in 1948, the West Bank was incorporated into the newly established Kingdom of Jordan, and, according to Joseph Massad, was subsequently ‘Jordanised’ (Massad 2001, 12). Even after the war in 1967 and the beginning of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Jordan has continued to maintain strong links with this region and continues to fund and manage health, agriculture, and education programs (Dumper 1994, 63). When Israel first occupied the West Bank in 1967, it began to rule there by means of military laws and military courts (Kelly 2006, 7). Paradoxically, the Oslo Accords in 1993 only worsened the economic situation as Israel maintained control over the borders and thus over the movement of labour and goods (Carey 2001, 95). In addition, between 1994 and 2000 alone, Israel confiscated approximately 35,000 acres of land (ibid). Since 1967, Bethlehem in particular has been affected by the confiscation of land to build Israeli settlements and by the separation wall (Kårtveit 2014, 63). Moreover, the combined effect of the wall and the Israeli settlements mean that the northern West Bank is nearly completely separated from the southern part of the West Bank.

816 Independent. 18 September 2014. Israel goes back 4,000 years in 'attempt to divide and rule' its Arab minority.
Bank. Nevertheless, Tobias Kelly reported that ten thousand Palestinians continued to work in Israeli settlements as of 2006 (Kelly 2006, 65).

Interestingly, until the outbreak of the first intifada in 1987, the centre of Palestinian resistance was in the diaspora, i.e. in the refugee camps in Jordan, and in Lebanon, and Nadine Picaudou argues that ‘la résistance passive de celui qui reste agrippé à la terre (ṣumūd) a dû attendre la première intifada pour conquérir ses lettres de noblesse’ (Picaudou 2006, 12). As a result of the first intifada and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, the centre of Palestinian resistance shifted to the West Bank and Gaza, whose inhabitants now seem to embody this very resistance. At the same time, however, the intifada provoked a complete collapse of the economy in the West Bank (Kelly 2006, 10).

All these developments have affected Christian-Muslim relations in the West Bank. Yet there is a contrast between the attitude of the PA towards Christians and the growing interreligious tensions. Christian Palestinians such as Ḥanān Ashrawī, to name only one, have played a key role in the PLO and in the subsequent Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority officially recognises thirteen Christian communities that deal with family matters (Fleyfel 2013, 139). In addition, it has established a quota system that guarantees the political representation of Christians. 10% of the seats in the parliament are allocated to Christians (Fleyfel 2013, 140) and the heads of the local councils in Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Ramallah, Bir Zeit, Jifna, Taiyba, Abud, Ain Arik, and Zababdeh must be Christians (Raheb 2012, 39). In addition, the electoral districts of Ramallah-al-Bira, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Gaza have one or two seats allocated to Christians (Raheb 2012, 40). At the same time, the occupation, isolation, and economic hardship have contributed to mounting tensions between Christians and Muslims in the West Bank. In this context, Christians are often viewed as arrogant and spoilt, benefitting from support from the churches and from Western donors and remittances (Kårtveit 2014, 99). The issue of church support of Christians will be discussed below in the introduction. Marie-Armelle Beaulieu has also mentioned the growing influence of Islamist puritanism (affecting both Christians and Muslims), which pressures Christians into closing their shops during Ramadan and into actually complying with the rules of Ramadan (Beaulieu 23 March 2015). During the intifada, militants sought refuge in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem which gave rise to conflicting reports about this event (Kårtveit 2014, 98). Interestingly, such events are systematically downplayed by Christian Palestinian leaders because they fear this lack of unity may jeopardize the Palestinian cause. In the context of the protests against Pope Benedict XVI’s speech in Regensburg, several churches in Nablus, Gaza,
and Tulkarem were firebombed (Kårtveit 2014, 102). A church leader again tried to downplay this event, speaking of ‘two to three isolated acts’ and admitting that Christians tended to maintain silence in the face of these events to avoid worsening the situation.

Gaza has faced a complete breakdown of social and economic structures and the family clans have filled the space these have left. This is a result of Israeli economic policies in the 1960s and 1970s, the Israeli embargo on Gaza following its retreat and failure to cooperate with the PA, and the collapse of the Palestinian Authority (ICG 2007, i, 2, 3–4). As a result, powerful clans have filled the gap, establishing militias, autonomous zones, informal justice, and a kind of welfare system that has helped to ease potential tensions between rich and poor (ICG 2007, I, 6). At the same time, Hamas tried to reclaim public space after 2007 but with limited success (ICG 2007, 13).

As a result, the situation is particularly difficult for Christians in Gaza, as they are affected by the generally difficult social and economic situation and also by increasing Islamisation. Yet Hamas does defend Christians in principle, as Father Rafiq Khoury has conceded (Khoury 25 March 2015). In a document dating from 1988 entitled “The Movement’s Policy towards the Christians of Palestine”, Hamas asserted that Christians constituted an inseparable component of the Palestinian people, having the same rights and duties, and reminded them of the importance of participating in the struggle (Hroub 2000, 135). On a very personal level, Hamas leaders do have an attachment to the Christian presence in Gaza, as some of them send their children to Christian schools (Beaulieu 23 March 2015). Nevertheless, no Christian participated in the foundation of Hamas and the movement seems to display an incapacity to go beyond a certain point of Christian-Muslim practice (Hroub 2000, 139).

As previously suggested, churches have come to play an active role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Latin church under the former patriarch Michel Sabbah, and the Greek Catholic Melkite Church in particular have both been very vocal in this regard. In December 2000, during the intifada, Michel Sabbāḥ explained this involvement as follows:

Les chefs des Eglises de Jérusalem ont été plus d’une fois critiqués par les autorités sous prétexte qu’ils interféraient indûment dans la vie politique […] Je le réaffirme : les chefs religieux ont le droit et le devoir d’intervenir dans une situation politique qui produit l’instabilité générale […] [L’Église parle] parle pour faire son devoir qui consiste à dénoncer l’injustice, à défendre l’opprimé (Labévière 2000, 333).

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The current Melkite patriarch, Gregorius III, was the patriarchal vicar in Jerusalem before his election to patriarch and in 1992 he protested the deportation of 413 Palestinians accused of being members of Hamas and of Islamic Jihad: ‘We all [are] fighting in the same trench. If they are deportees, then we, too, are deportees. If they are terrorists, then we, too, are terrorists’ (Hroub 2000, 138).

Some Palestinian clerics have also formulated a “liberation” or “contextual theology.” Among the most famous authors of this theory are Fr. Rafiq Khoury, mentioned above, Rev. Mitri Raheb, Naim Ateek, former Patriarch Michel Sabbah, former Bishop Elias Shaqour and Fr. Geries S. Khoury, who have tried to re-interpret the Bible in the context of Israeli occupation and Palestinian national dispossession.

This shows that the involvement of clerics in the defence of Palestinian rights is connected to the extent to which the church considers itself a genuine Arab church. For instance, the Greek Catholic Church was the product of a conflict between the Greek Orthodox hierarchy and the Arab laity – similar to the conflict currently affecting the Greek Orthodox of Jerusalem. Likewise, the Latin Patriarchate and the protestant churches – Anglican – were gradually “Arabised” in the second twentieth century, that is to say that their leadership was filled with local Arab clerics. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and other churches, such as the Syriac Orthodox church, do express support for Palestinian rights and criticize Israeli occupation and politics (as mentioned above) but they do not have much leverage. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate lacks strong foreign support and has to deal with Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and Greece.

4.1 Reactions in Jerusalem and the West Bank

This first section will analyse reactions in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Churches tended to resort to official statements, whereas Muslim actors expressed their condemnation mainly through protests. High-ranking Christian-Muslim reactions form a key part of this section.

4.1.1. Reactions of the Churches in Jerusalem and the West Bank

This first sub-section starts by looking at the reactions of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Latin Patriarchate, the Syriac Orthodox Church, and the Greek Catholic Melkite Church.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

The reactions of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem comprise one official statement issued by its official spokesman, Fr. ‘Isā Muṣlaḥ and three different reactions by
Bishop ʿAtāʾ Allāh Ḥannā. In addition, ʿĪsā Muṣlah and Bishop ʿAtāʾ Allāh Ḥannā also participated in high-ranking joint Christian-Muslim conferences (see Section 4.1.3).

On 13 September 2012, the spokesman of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Fr. ʿĪsā Muṣlah,820 issued an official statement in the name of the Church condemning the video “The Innocence of Muslims.”821 The statement laid out the patriarchate’s very ‘clear’ position on the issue of ‘offense (isāʾa) of the right (ḥaqq) of religions,’ opposing such offenses. The video was classed as an ‘inhuman crime’ that reflected ‘loathing’ and a ‘spirit of hateful racism against Islam and Muslims.’ Thus, the spokesman demanded the film be prohibited, its producers be punished, and its repetition be forbidden. To counter the video, the statement addressed all ‘believers in God among the sons of the revealed religions,’ asking them to remain united.

Bishop ʿAtāʾ Allāh Ḥannā, bishop of Sebastia (a village in the Nablus Governorate), was very vocal on the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims.” He first published a statement on September 12 then referred to it during a mass in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on September 16 before finally mentioning it once again in an interview on September 27. Bishop ʿAtāʾ Allāh Ḥannā is the only Arab bishop of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. He was born in 1965 in a village in Galilee.822 He completed his studies and doctorate at the University of Thessaloniki and was ordained in 1991 (ibid), adopting the name of “Theodosius.”823 Before his election to bishop of Sebastia in 2005 by the Holy Synod, he was responsible for the Arabic section of the patriarchate and was its official spokesman.824 Moreover, ʿAtāʾ Allāh Ḥannā has been very active in interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, and the Palestinian movement, as he is said to have founded the Orthodox Youth Movement in the Holy Land and to be an active member of the National Arabic Platform (al-muʿtamar al-ʿarabī). In this regard, he rejects the very idea that Christians and Muslims are two separate communities: ‘In my opinion there are no communities (ṭawāʾif) in Palestine. The Christians
are not a ṭāʾifa. They are an indivisible part of the original Arab Palestinian people.'

He emphasised: ‘We do not divide the martyrs into Muslims and Christians. All martyrs are ours.’

In the context of “The Innocence of Muslims” and of the price-tag, some of his views were expressed more clearly.

On September 12, a statement was published which was issued by the bishop in which he condemned “The Innocence of Muslims.” In this statement, Bishop ʿAṭāʾ Allāh Ḥannā criticized it, calling it ‘this suspicious and offending film,’ ‘this assault, these offenses and these attacks,’ ‘these racist practices and the assault on religious symbols,’ ‘this inhuman work.’ Interestingly, although the bishop described the video in various ways, he did not dwell at all on its background but rather framed it in the context of a conspiracy undertaken by ‘sides who command and enjoy the assault on religious symbols.’ In addition, he regarded its authors in the same way as those who offended ‘our Christian religion, and especially Lord Christ and his mother, the Virgin.’ Consequently, he saw the video as aiming to ‘stir up sectarian conflict, strife, and extremism,’ especially ‘strife in our ranks’ and to ‘divide us.’ It is noteworthy that the bishop spoke alternatively in the name of Christians and in the name of both Muslims and Christians. Thus, he expressed his solidarity with Muslims in the name of Christians while it was in the name of both Christians and Muslims that he stated ‘We will not deliver our mosques and our churches.’ However, his addressing Muslims worldwide to remind them that ‘We condemn this,’ seems to reflect the limits of mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims. This impression is further enhanced by the bishop’s concession that ‘As we need dialogue, convergence, mutual understanding between the followers of the monotheist religions, we also need tolerance and religious brotherhood.’ Interestingly, he appealed to Muslim and Christian clerics in particular to be in ‘a state of mutual understanding and cooperation’ for the sake of unity.

Furthermore, the video was mentioned during Bishop ʿAṭāʾ Allāh Ḥannā’s sermon in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on 16 September 2012 together with several other issues. In this sermon, the bishop again framed the video as an attack affecting both Muslims and Christians. However, he did not mention the title of the video, instead referring to ‘the continued and sustained offenses (isāʾāt),’ this time affecting not only Islam, but also ‘all moral values.’

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827 “وراء هذا الفيلم المشبوه المسيء إما هي جهات تتآمر وتتنافى ب التطاول على الرمز الدينية”

828 “هذا الاعتداء والاعتدادات”

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The bishop stated that these sort of “offenses” had previously targeted the ‘sacred places (muqaddasāt) and religious symbols (al-rumūz al-dīniyya)” of Christianity. Interestingly, ‘Aṭā’ Allāh Ḥannā once again stressed the necessity for unity in reaction to this video and the need for dialogue between the religions.

In this sermon, the bishop also mentioned the anniversary of the massacre of Shubra and Shatila, and the conflict in Syria. He deplored the war in Syria in particular, as he considered the country to be a key element in the region. He stated that Christians there have been attacked and expelled from their homes by the rebels and that the churches have been destroyed. Yet despite this he called on Christians in the East: ‘I say to the Eastern Christians’ to remain patient, steadfast in their homes and to combat evil with love.

In his interview published on September 27, the bishop’s reaction was much more a justification and a clearer denunciation of the Israeli occupation. In the name of the Christians, ‘Aṭā’ Allāh Ḥannā emphasised that the ‘film does not represent Christians in their different communities (tawā’īf),’ and recalled the harsh rejection of the film by all churches in ‘occupied Jerusalem.’ The bishop did mention the information concerning Coptic involvement but referred to the denial of involvement of Copts in the diaspora. Overall, the video was described as an uncivilised work, as part of a long series of “offenses (isāʾāt),” of which the attack on the monastery of Latrun was the most recent example. Thus, it was by mentioning the price-tag committed against this monastery that the bishop was able to connect the video with Israeli occupation. He condemned ‘Zionist extremism in particular and its racist attacks on monasteries and churches in Jerusalem and the West Bank.’ Again, Bishop ‘Aṭā’ Allāh Ḥannā called for cooperation between Christians and Muslims, for a refocusing, especially on the ‘Palestinian issue,’ and for unity in ‘the ranks so that we remain one united family against racism and colonialism.’

The Latin Patriarchate

The Latin Patriarchate initially published an official statement condemning the video. Then it reaffirmed its condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” when its bishops met in late September 2012 in Amman. Bishop William al-Shūmālī also participated in a high-ranking Christian-Muslim conference (see Section 4.1.3). Furthermore, the Latin priest Peter Madrous also contributed his individual reaction. Since 2008, the Latin Patriarchate has been led by Al-Ahed. 27 September 2012. المطران عطا الله حنا لـ"الانتقاد": جهات مشبوهة تقف وراء الإساءة للنبي الأكرم .. ولا سبيل لردعها إلا بتوحد المسيحيين والمسلمين. Doi: http://www.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetai...id=76#.Vv0kpEerIW (retrieved May 16, 2016)

829 المعطى العطار الله حنا لـ "الانتقاد": جهات مشبوهة تقف وراء الإساءة للنبي الأكرم .. ولا سبيل لردعها إلا بتوحد المسيحيين والمسلمين.

830 بضرورة التركيز على القضايا الوطنية والإنسانية وفي مقدمتها قضية فلسطين ومقدساتها. يضرورة التركيز على القضايا الوطنية والإنسانية وفي مقدمتها قضية فلسطين ومقدساتها.".
Fuʿād Ṭwāl, a Jordanian and “East Banker.” He was born in 1940 in Madaba, attended the seminary in Beit Jala, was ordained in 1966 in Jerusalem and entered the diplomatic service of the Vatican, representing the Roman Catholic Church in several countries (RIIFS 2008). In 1992 he was ordained bishop of Tunis (ibid).

The Latin Patriarchate’s statement was mentioned in *al-Quds* on September 16. Overall, the statement is rather brief, qualifying the video as ‘this outrageous work,’ ‘this clumsy and cheap incitement,’ conducted, interestingly, by ‘a cinema film’ ‘insulting Islam.’ Unlike the previous statements, this statement also posited its condemnation as a Christian one, as ‘Christians who believe in interreligious dialogue we cannot accept this,’ seeing the film as aiming to ‘sow hatred and sectarian strife.’ In addition, the statement alluded to the same argument put forward by the Latin Bishops later on in Amman, stating that one’s personal freedom stops where the freedom of the other begins. The Latin Patriarchate also called for an end to such attacks on religions.

The bishops of the Latin Patriarchate met in Amman from 17 – 20 September 2012. Although the meeting took place in Amman, it is nevertheless relevant to this chapter, since the Latin Patriarchate’s jurisdiction comprises the Palestinian Territories and Jordan. The following people participated:

- Fuʿād Ṭwāl;
- Giacinto-Paul Marcuzzo, patriarchal vicar of Nazareth;
- Mārūn Lahḥām, bishop and patriarchal vicar of Amman (Lahham 2012);
- William al-Shūmālī, bishop of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories;  
- İfīnsīū Herreira Diez, a priest in Cyprus;
- Giorgio Lingua, apostolic nuncio and archbishop of Iraq and Jordan from 2010 to 2015;

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831 Latin Patriarchate. 20 September 2012. بيان صادر عن مؤتمر أساقفة اللاتين في الدول العربية ومجلس رؤساء الكنيسة الكاثوليك في الأراضي المقدسة. Doi: http://ar.lpj.org/2012/09/20/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84/ (retrieved May, 16 2016).

832 William al-Shūmālī was born in 1050 in Beit Sahur (Bayt Sāḥūr), in 1972 he was ordained vicar for the diocese Zarqa North, in Jordan. In 2005 he was named rector of the seminary in Beit Jala (Bayt Jālā) and in 2010 he was consecrated auxiliary bishop of Jerusalem. In Latin Patriarchate. H.E. William Shomali Biography. Doi: http://en.lpj.org/vicars/patriarchal-vicar-for-jerusalem/h-e-william-hanna-shomali-biography/ (retrieved May 16, 2016).

- Adel Zaki (‘Ādil Zakī), bishop of Alexandria;
- Paul Dahdah (Būlus Daḥdah), bishop of Beirut;
- Camillo Ballin, apostolic vicar of the northern Arabian Peninsula;
- Paul Hinder, apostolic vicar of the southern Arabian Peninsula;
- Giuseppe Nazzaro, apostolic vicar of Aleppo until 2013;\(^\text{834}\)
- Jean Sleiman (Jān Binyamīn Sulaymān), bishop of Iraq;
- Giorgio Bertin, bishop of Djibouti and apostolic representative in Mogadishu;
- Pater Pietro Felet, secretary of the Assembly of Latin bishops.\(^\text{835}\)

The statement addressed several subjects such as Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Lebanon, the situation in the region – especially in Syria –, and the video “The Innocence of Muslims.” This video is discussed in a separate paragraph under the title ‘The Offense of Religious Symbols (\(\text{al-\textit{isāʾ} a ilā \textit{al-rumūz al-dīniyya}\})’). Interestingly, the video was condemned in explicit terms, ‘the film “The Innocence of Muslims”,’ but its exact background was not specified. Furthermore, Muhammad was understood to be a “religious symbol.” Interestingly, the video was not criticised in religious terms, but within a moral framework. Thus, the bishops asserted that the video was produced under the pretence of freedom of speech and admonish that one’s personal freedom stops where the freedom of the other begins. The bishops also condemned the ‘offense of religious symbols in the Holy Land,’ thus framing the statement in the context of the so-called price-tag. Unlike other reactions, which tended to distinguish between “\(\text{al-rumūz al-dīniyya}\)” (religious symbols) and “\(\text{al-muqaddasāt}\)” (sacred places or things), this statement suggested the use of the phrase “religious symbols” as a general concept, comprising any religious symbol, place, content, or figure. The bishops called for an international law forbidding such offenses as well as for the prosecution of the makers of this film, while also


emphasising the importance of the education of future generations to ‘respect the creed of the other.’

With regards to the motivation for this statement, the Latin bishop of Amman, Mārūn Lahḥām stressed that ‘We condemn any action, any film, any report, any article that disturbs the peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims.’ Thus the condemnations by the Latin Church were seemingly primarily motivated by the potential violent reactions of Muslims; ‘especially for Muslims, they are very sensitive […] so we, in order to prevent any violent reactions we condemn anything that hurts Muslims or Christians’ (ibid).

Additionally, the Latin priest Peter Madrous (Pītir Madrūs) published a comment in al-Quds on 30 September 2012 on “The Innocence of Muslims.” The comment did not dwell specifically on the content of the video, but rather discussed its background. Pītir Madrūs discusses the possibility of Coptic involvement, as reported in the media, and rejected this idea. He asserted instead that neither the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, much less the Coptic Church, would support such a “film.” Thus, although the maker of the video may have a been a Copt, Pītir Madrūs ascribed the producers’ mind-set to ‘the modernising and new secessionist groups the Church does not recognize,’ and has been facing, according to Madrūs, since the Reformation in the sixteenth century. He accused these groups of having always supported a Jewish state since their establishment. Pītir Madrūs equated these “modernising secessionist groups” with Evangelical groups in the United States. This reflects a strong anti-Protestant stance. However, “The Innocence of Muslims” seems to have provided him with an opportunity to discuss the plight of Palestinians and the situation of Arab Christians. The article starts by evoking the United Nations discussing the violation of the rights of Palestinians, and ends with a speech made in the name of Muslim and Christian Palestinians asserting: ‘We do not want surrender, but peace, we do not want supplication, but respect!’ In addition, Pītir Madrūs discussed the emigration of Arab Christians and noted that this had been an ongoing phenomenon since the nineteenth century. Yet he criticised the current wave of emigration as happening merely for materialistic and financial reasons and underlines the ‘vice and shame’ of Palestine being finally devoid of its Christians.

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837 Peter Madrous was born in 1972 in Jerusalem and has served in several dioceses, including in South Sudan (Abouna. الأب بيتر مدروس – الفلسطينيون. Doi: http://www.abouna.org/authors/27 (retrieved May 16, 2016)). He has been a prolific theologian and writer (ibid), and manages his own website (Doi: http://www.petermadros.net/ar/ (retrieved May 16, 2016)).
The Syriac Orthodox Church

On 24 September 2012, al-Quds published a commentary by the Syriac Orthodox bishop of the Holy Land, mār Sīrīyūs Malikī Marrād (also written Mor Severios Malke Mourad). In this commentary, a reaction to the film, the bishop insisted that he had preceded ‘our Muslim brothers’ in condemning the video, described as ‘the spread of offenses’ which aimed to sow strife. The reaction placed particular emphasis on the good relations between Christians and Muslims in the region, a fact which rested on a common history. As a result, the bishop stated that it was impossible for anyone to influence the ‘brotherly relations between us,’ strongly ‘rooted in the depth of time.’ In addition, he quoted the adage “Religion is for God and the nation is for all” (al-đīn li-l-lāh wa l-waṭan li l-jāmi`ī). Furthermore, Sīrīyūs Malikī Marrād calls on the United Nations to take measures. This statement is very interesting because, unlike the Latin and the Greek Orthodox churches, the Syriac Orthodox Church is not a “Palestinian, Arab” church and lacks significance in terms of numbers and social services. Yet the Syriac Orthodox bishop Sirīyūs Malikī Marrād both evoked and affirmed the good relations between Christians and Muslims, unlike the two other churches.

The Greek Catholic Melkite Church

The Greek Catholic Melkite priest of Bethlehem, Father Ya`qūb Abū Sa`dī, also issued a public reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims.” He condemned the video for its timing, which he claimed pointed to the fact that its goal was to stir up strife, and denied that it was an expression of freedom of expression. Interestingly, Father Ya`qūb Abū Sa`dī was seemingly one of the few clerics who explicitly mentioned the background to the video, i.e. ‘the film offending (film musī`ī) the “prophet Muhammad,”’ by an American producer.’ His call for unity rested on the fact that ‘since in the East, we live with Muslims and Jews, we have to live together in love and peace, public interest (maṣlaḥa), peaceful coexistence, and brotherly love.’ According to the Melkite priest, Christian-Muslim (and Christian-Muslim-Jewish coexistence) did not result from a common history or a common enemy but from a reality. This reaction was the only one which expressed unity between Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

839 Bishop Sirīyūs Malikī Marrād was born in 1966 in Malqyye, Syria, he was named secretary of the patriarch in 1984, he was bishop of São Paolo from 1993 to 1996 (Maier 2004, 305-312). In 1996 he was named patriarchal vicar in Jerusalem, comprising Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Egypt (ibid). There are approximately 5,000 Syriac Orthodox in the Holy Land, two thirds of them living in Bethlehem (ibid).


Summary of Section 4.1.1

All in all, the reactions to the video seem to vary, ranging from symbolic condemnation to elaborate condemnation. Few churches mentioned the backdrop to the film at all and few discussed or mentioned a Coptic background. For Bishop ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh Ḥannā, this video also afforded an opportunity to condemn the Israeli occupation. The counter-arguments emphasised the moral flaws of this video and its potential threat to Palestinian unity. This unity rests on a common history (Syriac Orthodox Church), the same plight and the same enemy (‘Aṭāʾ Allāh Ḥannā), and a simple fact (Melkite priest).

4.1.2 Other Reactions

The Muftī

In reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims,” the muftī Muḥammad Ḥusayn tried to appear active. He issued two statements; the first one on September 13 condemning “The Innocence of Muslims,” and the second one on September 19 condemning the cartoons published by Charlie Hebdo. He also participated in a joint Christian-Muslim conference in Ramallah (see Section 4.1.3). Besides the muftī, the other counterpart to official Islamic institutions, the Ministry of Islamic Endowments of the Palestinian Authority, also staged a protest in reaction to the video (see Section 4.1.3).

In his press communiqué published on 13 September 2012, shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn described the video as ‘The repetition of outrageous work against Islam and its noble Messenger’ and as ‘this immoral and uncivilised work in all its dimensions’ he attributed to ‘the thirst of a small, misguided group for instability and insecurity in the world’ and ‘worldwide suspicious, hatred and racist sides.’ In addition, Muḥammad Ḥusayn accused the video of contributing to hatred between people worldwide and considered it a ‘violation of religions and its symbols.’ In particular, he accused the West of allowing such “offenses” under the pretence of freedom of expression. Yet the muftī also condemned the violent reactions to the film. In an effort to counter the video, he called on international organizations to issue a law forbidding such “offenses.” He also praised the condemnations issued by the ‘churches in Palestine and the Arab countries.’

Similarly, when condemning the cartoons published by Charlie Hebdo on September 19, muftī Muḥammad Ḥusayn described it as ‘this immoral work.’ The article also mentioned the ‘cartoons offending (musīʾa) the Messenger in a French magazine.’ In this statement the muftī expressed the idea of the video and the cartoons being an “offense” calling it an ‘insistence on mastering (tafannun) offense against Islam and its symbols,’ which ‘harm (yusīʾ)’ peaceful human relations.’ This time, he specifically called on the United Nations to issue a law prohibiting ‘assault on religions’ and on the Islamic Conference and the ministers of information to set up TV channels to explain Islam which would target Western countries. Furthermore, he also asked YouTube and Google to take this video down. In addition, the muftī repeated his praise of the condemnations issued by the churches and Christian clerics in the region and throughout the world. To some extent, the muftī might have been suggesting that there was a Christian background to this video, as he underlined his belief that condemnation on the part of the churches and clerics was all the more important since the video ‘harms the coexistence between Muslims and Christians.’

On 15 September 2012, al-Quds featured a short interview with Dr. Ḥannā Farrāj who condemned “The Innocence of Muslims.” As ‘an Arab Palestinian,’ he considered “The Innocence of Muslims” to constitute a provocation for the feelings of Muslims. However, he stated that the video could not possibly harm ‘the brotherly relations between Christians and Muslims.’

4.1.3 Countering “The Innocence of Muslims”

In the context of Jerusalem and the West Bank, several actions took place to express the rejection of “The Innocence of Muslims.” These reactions comprised protests, both organized and without any specific leadership, and joint Christian-Muslim conferences.

4.1.3.1 Protests

First of all, protests without any specific leadership took place in several places, such as in Jerusalem on Friday, 14 September 2012 after Friday prayers; in the refugee camp of Shuʿafāṭ on or around September 18; in Ramallah (Rām Allāh) and al-Bireh (al-Bīra) on

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847 Al-Quds. 19 September 2012. On the sixth day of the protests, there were clashes in the Shuafat refugee camp. Number 15479. Page 3.
Friday, 21 September 2012 after Friday prayers, and in Bethlehem on Friday, 14 or 21 September 2012. The march in Jerusalem on Friday, 14 September 2012, passed through the Damascus Gate of the old city and went up to the US embassy. According to the Israeli police, approximately two hundred youths from the Shuʿafāʾ refugee camp protested and clashed with the police, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails. The title of this article suggests that the protest was connected to the video. The protest in Bethlehem after Friday prayers in which dozens of people participated was also a protest against the economic policy of the PA.

Secondly, several protests were led either by Sufi orders, local political leaders, or civil society. The Sufi order al-Rifāʿiyya led a march in Nablus (Nāblus) on September 15; and the Sufi order al-Qādiriyya led a march in Jenin on September 20. Interestingly, the march in Jenin demonstrated the ongoing importance of Sufism in Palestinian society, as local Islamic officials, such as the Sharia judge, the mujātī of the city, and the leader of the order itself were among the high-ranking participants. The march was led by drums, anāšīd (hymns) and slogans.

The minister of Islamic Endowments, Maḥmūd al-Habāsh, also staged a protest in front of his ministry in al-Bireh, which gathered together imams, preachers, the ‘ulamāʾ and their families. During this protest the minister delivered a speech in which he warned against the goals of this video, which he claimed were to stir up strife between Christians and Muslims, especially in the Middle East. However, he reminded his audience: ‘we are here, strongly united (yad wāḥida), against all these attempts.’ He called for all the people involved in the video to be punished and called on the United Nations and the international community to issue a law forbidding such “offenses.” Furthermore, the minister also announced that the ministry would launch a campaign entitled “This is Muhammad, the Messenger of God,” and specifically asked Al-Azhar and Saudi Arabia to support this initiative. Minister Maḥmūd al-Habāsh condemned
the violent reactions implicitly by appealing to reactions that reflect the ‘method of Muhammad.’

On 21 September 2012, a “festival” took place in al-Bireh, which started at the mosque and during the course of which two speeches were given.\textsuperscript{857} \textit{Al-Ḥayāt al-Jadīda} reported that slogans supporting Muhammad and condemning the “offenses” were featured on the march. In her speech the governor of the province Ramallah-al-Bireh, Layla Ghannām, did not provide a clear background explanation for the video but instead asserted: ‘Irony and blackmailing is the language of those who fail,’ and further condemned the video as an ‘immoral act.’ In addition, Layla Ghannām considered “The Innocence of Muslims” – which she did not mention either as a film or by its title – to be an ‘offense (isā’ā) against all revealed religions,’ and therefore asked for a law forbidding the production of such films.\textsuperscript{858}

Interestingly, in her speech Layla Ghannām defined Palestine as a model for Christian-Muslim relations.\textsuperscript{859} She reminded her audience that ‘Palestine was and will remain a model for the respect of religions and the brotherhood of Muslims and Christians.’ For the governor, this model rested upon religious events such as the fact that it is the place where Muhammad ascended to heaven and where Jesus Christ – mentioned as ‘al-māsīḥ ‘alayhi al-salām’ – was born. She stressed the model of Christian-Muslim relations in Palestine as a model for the world several times. She saw these relations accordingly as characterised by ‘respect, love and tolerance.’ Like other Palestinian actors, Governor Layla Ghannām praised condemnations made by ‘Christians.’

In addition, \textit{al-Ḥayāt al-Jadīda} named a representative of the organization “The Popular Campaign for the Support of the Noble Prophet,” a certain Khālid al-Ḥilw, who used his speech at this festival to call for an international law prohibiting such “offenses” which would be similar to the international law criminalising the denial of the Holocaust. Furthermore, he announced that his organization would work on providing the world with a true image of Muhammad in different languages. The newspaper reported that other people also delivered

\textsuperscript{857} \textit{Al-Ḥayāt al-Jadīda}. 22 September 2012. 

\textsuperscript{858} Layla Ghannām joined the Fatah Movement at an early age. She was quickly elected to the council of Ramallah and was named governor in 2010. The main task of the governor under the Palestinian Authority is to oversee the security forces and all municipal activities as well as to be in contact with the IDF. In Y Net News. 31 January 2010. First female Palestinian governor envisions change. Doi: http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3842196,00.html (retrieved May 16, 2016).

\textsuperscript{859} \textit{Al-Ḥayāt al-Jadīda}. 22 September 2012.
speeches at this festival, among them Ḥayyān al-Idrīsī, the president of the Association for the Blind.⁸⁶⁰

On October 3, al-Quds also reported that a ‘sporting-religious festival’ organized by the Palestinian Union of Martial Arts took place in Tulkarm.⁸⁶¹ Several high-ranking actors participated in this conference; the deputy governor of the province of Tulkarm, Samīr Nāyifa, who is also the press speaker for the branch of Fatah in Tulkarm,⁸⁶² the president of the Palestinian Union of Martial Arts, Jihād ʿAwīḍa; and ʿUmār al-Badawī, the muftī of the province.

4.1.3.2 Christian-Muslim Reactions

Joint Christian-Muslim reactions in Jerusalem and the West Bank comprised two conferences and one visit by a Christian association to the muftī and Ministry of Islamic Endowments. The two conferences are particularly interesting because of the language used to express national unity.

The first conference took place on 25 September 2012 in Ramallah and was organized by the Ministry of Islamic Endowments under the title “Our muqaddasāt … The Symbol of our Dignity and the Face (ʿunwān) of our Identity: The Attack on them is a Threat to our Existence.”⁸⁶³ Thus, the conference established a clear connection between the issue of religious symbols and the Palestinian cause, and the very existence of Palestinians in Palestine and Israel. When quoting the comments, the word “muqaddasāt” is not translated, and its meaning will be discussed at the end of this chapter. The conference started with the recitation of verses of the Quran by an ʿulamāʾ, then continued with speeches and ended with the issuing of a joint statement. Those who delivered speeches included Maḥmūd al-Habāsh, minister of Islamic Endowments; ʿĪsā Muṣlaḥ, the spokesman of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate; muftī Muḥammad Ḥusayn; Bishop William al-Shūmalī; MP Muḥammad Barakā, deputy of the Israeli Knesset; and Ḥannā ʿĪsā, the director of the Islamic-Christian Authority for the Protection of Jerusalem and Sacred Places (al-ḥay’a al-islāmiyya al-masāḥiya li nuṣrāt al-quds wa l-muqaddasāt).

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⁸⁶³ Al-Quds. 30 September 2012. في إطار الجهود الرامية لوقف الاعتداء على الأديان و القداسات عقدت وزارة الأوقاف والشؤون الإسلامية مؤتمرا دينياً إسلامياً مسيحياً يعوّنا: مقدستنا ... رمز كرامتنا و عنوان هويتنا و وهذا ما نرتبه نحن تجاه فلسطين. Number 15494. Page 20. This source is quoted in this section as “al-Quds 30 September 2012.”
The minister of Islamic Endowments, Maḥmūd al-Habāsh condemned ‘all acts that offend (*tusiʿ*) *muqaddasāt* in all their Islamic and Christian elements,’ and more precisely defined: ‘through racist acts of destroying and writing slogans, and the attacks on *muqaddasāt*,’ alluding to the “price-tag” on the monastery of Latrun in early September 2012, and the ‘offending film.’ He further condemned ‘these offenses against the truth (*haqq*) of the prophets and the *muqaddasāt.*’ The minister thus considered Muslims and Christians in Palestine to be facing the same threats. Furthermore, he called on Jewish clerics to condemn such “offenses” clearly, on the international community to condemn this video, and on the United Nations to issue a law forbidding acts such as this. Maḥmūd al-Habāsh also signaled that the Palestinian Authority had undertaken some initiatives in response to the film.

The spokesman of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Īsā Muṣṭaḥ similarly stated that such “attacks” on religious symbols and institutions affected Christians and Muslims in Palestine equally and the deep solidarity between Christians and Muslims; ‘Offending the Messenger Muhammad is offending all Arabs, Muslims and their *muqaddasāt*, and it is a threat to all prophets and messengers.’ This quotation might suggest that Jesus Christ is counted amongst “the prophets and messengers” as well as the idea that Muhammad is important to Christians (al-Quds 30 September 2012). Furthermore, this solidarity is perceived as taking place within the framework of Palestinian national unity, as Īsā Muṣṭaḥ equated ‘targeting the churches, targeting the mosques, or targeting the presence of the Palestinians on their land.’

Furthermore, the spokesman considered this conference an opportunity to send ‘a message in which we assert our unity and our love for the country and the land of peace’ (al-Quds 30 September 2012). Finally, he called on all churches worldwide to support the protection of the al-Aqṣā mosque. Thus, Īsā Muṣṭaḥ established a shared destiny between Christians and Muslims.

This idea was similarly expressed by the *muftī* of Jerusalem and the Palestinian homelands, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, stating that ‘offending the prophets like the film offending the Messenger Muhammad (PBUH) and the mocking cartoons, and what happened to the prophet Īsā through offending slogans on the walls of churches’ equally ‘affects the feelings of the believers’ (al-Quds 30 September 2012). Yet the *muftī* asserted that all these attempts at stirring up ‘unrest and strife between the sons of this society [underlined by the author]’ would fail. In

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this quotation the term “sons of this society” has been underlined due to the use of these rather neutral words to designate the unity which exists despite Palestinian religious pluralism, particularly when compared to Lebanese and Egyptian reactions to the film. Furthermore, the muftī called on Christians from Palestine and Jerusalem to return to their homes, though it is not quite clear what he meant by this.

Bishop William al-Shūmalī represented the Latin patriarch Fuʿād Ṭwāl and delivered his speech. In this speech, the bishop expressed the patriarch’s faith in the national Palestinian unity – ‘the brotherly convergence’ – in the context of repeated attacks, especially following the clash concerning the al-Aqṣā mosque (al-Quds 30 September 2012). He also criticised the West for its ‘indifference’ regarding the ‘mockery of others’ and repeated the moral statement formulated in the statement the Catholic bishops made in Amman; one’s personal freedom ends where the freedom of the other begins. Throughout his speech, Bishop al-Shūmalī seemed to distinguish between Christians and Muslims, since he considered this conference an assertion of ‘our unity, Muslims and Christians.’

Following the speech by the president of judges, shaykh Yūsif Id‘īs, the deputy of the Israeli Knesset, Muḥammad Baraka, gave a short speech in which he asserted the need for the world to learn from this Eastern model of pluralism (al-Quds 30 September 2012). In so doing he drew a direct line between the so-called Pact of ʿUmar (‘Omarian Pact’) and contemporary coexistence in the Middle East. In particular, Muḥammad Baraka called on the West to learn from this pact, described as ‘One of the greatest documents on tolerance in history.’ This speech is very interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it shows how Christian and Muslim leaders make recourse to certain events in history to explain, praise, assert, embellish and understand the present. Secondly, the presence of a Knesset MP at this conference suggests ongoing connections between Palestinians from varying political contexts, or at least between Israel and the West Bank.

In his speech, the director of the Islamic-Christian Authority for the Protection of Jerusalem and Sacred Places, Ḥannā ʿĪsā, harshly denounced Israel for its ‘Practices of persecution and extremism against the revealed religions in the holy city [Jerusalem]’ (al-Quds 30 September 2012). He established a connection between this ‘racist fanaticism’ and the

866 This authority comprises important members such as Bishop ʿAtāʾ Allāh Hannā, former Patriarch Michel Sabbah, the Protestant Bishop Munib Yunan and Father Naim Ateeq, who were named by the PA. In Al-Quds. تسمية أعضاء مجلس رؤساء الهيئة الإسلامية المسيحية للصحة القدس والمقدسات على الموقع الرسمي. Doi: http://www.elquds.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=101&Itemid=93&lang=ar (retrieved May 16, 2016).
‘ethnic, religious, and political conflicts’ the Middle East has been facing since the 1940s, the further spread of which he believes Palestinians need to stop.

In a long final statement, the participants equate ‘al-dīn/al-muqaddas’ (al-Quds 30 September 2012). Subsequently, “muqaddasāt” are defined in this statement as ‘our religious and moral values built on these muqaddasāt, be they persons, institutions, places of worship or even symbols.’ Furthermore, the “offense” represented by “The Innocence of Muslims” is equated with the price-tags recently affecting churches. The video is described as ‘[its practices of] offending the prophets, as happened lately with the prophet of mercy [underlined by the author] (PBUH) through a film offending his message and his great life and through cartoons mocking his noble person.’ Similarly, Jesus Christ is described as ‘the prophet of love (nabī al-maḥhabba) [underlined by the author], peace be upon him.’ These practices, both the video and the price-tag, are viewed as offending the feelings of Palestinians; ‘it offends and violates our religious feelings and emotions,’ and is thus rejected by both Christians and Muslims equally. All of these “offenses” stand accused of causing sectarian strife which ‘threatens the social woven fabric (al-nasīj al-ijtimāʿī),’ thus again using a rather neutral term. Furthermore, the participants of the conference called on the ‘revealed religions’ not to surrender to these attempts, called for the international community to issue an agreement forbidding an ‘attack on al-dīn/al-muqaddas,’ as well as enjoining Jewish clerics and rabbis to take a clear position condemning such offenses. In addition, the participants stated that no religion justifies this kind of offence.

On 9 October 2012, al-Quds reported on a conference organized in the province of Ramallah-al-Bireh by the Charitable Society of Lod (jamʿiyyat al-ludd al-khayriyya),867 in an article bearing the title “The Support of the Messenger (PBUH), of all Prophets and Messengers.”868 Three people were reported to have given speeches, while several other high-ranking people also participated; including the director of the Department for Research in Preaching at the Palestinian Ministry of Islamic Endowments.869

The president of this charitable association, Nāṣir Ramānah, expressed Palestinian unity through the use of several interesting terms: ‘Our Palestinian people, his Muslims and Christians, will remain its thorns in the throat of occupation, because we are the original people

867 Al-Quds. 9 October 2012. NUMBER 15503. PAGE 20.
869 Al-Quds. 9 October 2012.
and we are proud of our social and national woven fabric (underlined by the author)\(^{870}\) (ibid). Later on, the idea of being in the same “trench” is expressed; ‘the Muslims stand in one trench with their Christian brothers,’ an image which is suggestive of the feeling of being at a standstill in an immobile war. Seemingly, the issue of “The Innocence of Muslims,” which was not mentioned explicitly in this speech, was placed in the broader context of ‘all forms of attacks on mosques, churches and houses of worship,’ and ‘the attacks the Islamic sacred places are exposed to’ that were widely condemned by the ‘Christian brothers.’ Nāṣir Ramānah also asserted that the purpose of this conference was the protection of Muhammad – although he did not specify from what he required protection –, the condemnation of the clash over al-Aqṣā, and the price-tag of a church. In particular, he stressed that the role of those participating was to raise awareness among ‘the sons of the united people who bow to occupation, Muslims and Christians.’\(^{871}\)

Bishop ’Aṭā’ Allāh Ḥannā likewise expressed a deep sense of solidarity, stating that any attack on al-Aqṣā is an attack on Christians, and vice versa: ‘we are one body’ (ibid).

Several other imams and Islamic actors also gave speeches but their content was not covered by al-Quds. The conference’s final statement reiterated its condemnation of the participants of ‘any attack on the prophets, [and] Islamic and Christian sacred places (muqaddasāt)’ (ibid).

On Sunday, 30 September 2012, a delegation from the Association for the Development of the Christian Quarter in the Old City (jam‘iyyat ṭaṭwīr ḥārat al-naṣārā dākhil aswār al-balda al-qadīma) was received by shaykh ’Izzām al-Khaṭīb, the director of the section for Islamic Endowments and Affairs at al-Aqṣā mosque, the muftī, and several other non-specified actors.\(^{872}\) The leader of the delegation and president of this association, Bāṣsim Sa‘īd stated: ‘It is a national and religious duty that we stand side by side with our Muslim brothers’ and condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” (without mentioning its title) and the cartoons which ‘stir up strife between Islam and Christianity.’ The muftī stated that the Office of Islamic Endowments is a home for all Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem. Interestingly, the muftī further insisted on the unity between Christians and Muslims, both in terms of ‘wounds’ and ‘history’ and underlined the importance of the Christian presence in Jerusalem.

870 أن شعبنا الفلسطيني بمسلميه ومسيحيه سيظل شوكه في حنف الاحتلال لأننا شعب أصيل ونعتز بنسيجنا الاجتماعي والوطني.
871 التوحيد جسور الوحدة والوصل بين أبناء الشعب الواحد الذي يرضخ تحت الاحتلال من مسلمين ومسيحيين.
4.1.4 The Issue of “Price-Tag”

As the reactions throughout this section have shown, the video “The Innocence of Muslims” was placed in the same context as the so-called price-tag, particularly since several events of price-tag took place during the controversy over this video.

Patriarch Fu‘ād Ṭwāl, Bishop Giorgio Lingua, and former Patriarch Michel Sabbah issued a statement in connection with the attack on the Latroun monastery which occurred in early September 2012 in which they asked: ‘What is going on in Israeli society today that permits Christians to be scapegoated [sic!] and targeted by these acts of violence?’

On October 2, Jewish extremists under the leadership of a high-ranking member of the Likud party wanted to pray on the Dome of the Rock. At around the same time, slogans targeting Jesus Christ were found on the Franciscan monastery, Zion.

Two high-ranking visits and one conference took place in reaction to these events. On October 4, al-Quds reported on a Christian-Muslim visit to the Zion monastery undertaken by muftī Muḥammad Ḥusayn and Bishop ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh Ḥannā. On October 4, the Latin bishop William al-Shūmālī and a number of priests visited the Dome of the Rock. They were received by the muftī, and the director of the Islamic Endowments and al-Aqṣā Affairs. Muftī Muḥammad Ḥusayn reportedly stated that Jerusalem had always been a model of brotherhood between Christians and Muslims (ibid).

Finally, on 4 October 2012, the Liqa Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land (markaz al-liqāʾ li l-dirāsāt al-dīniyya wa l-turāthiyya fi l-arāḍī al-muqaddasāt), an organization which is led by former Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, organized a conference in cooperation with several organizations; the Authority of Ulema in Palestine, the Sabil Ecumenical Centre in Jerusalem (markaz al-sabīl), the Harmony Centre in Bethlehem (markaz wiʾām), and the Association for Social Development in Haifa (jamʿiyat al-ṭawīl al-ijtimāʿī). The purpose of this conference was to condemn the ‘attacks on prophets, messengers, Christians and Islamic sacred places (muqaddasāt)’ that are ‘supported by the

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873 *Haaretz* wrongly introduced Giorgio Lingua as the bishop of Jordan, but he was actually the bishop of Iraq.
875 Al-Quds. 3 October 2012. رسالة عاجلة إلى العاهل الأردني التدخل لوقف هذه الاستهلاكات. اعتداء على المقدسات الإسلامية والمعبدية في القدس. Number 15497. Pages 1 and 34.
876 Al-Quds. 4 October 2012. وفِي قِسْمِ إِسْلَامِی عِنْدَ زُورِ مِنْ نَّفْسِ السَّيِّدِ الْمُصْحَافِيَّ (الحسن). Number 15498.
In particular, the conference insisted on the need to ‘respect the specificity of religions as a basis for stability, and peace, as well as for local, regional and global security,’ and demanded the United Nations criminalise such “attacks” in ‘literature, pictures, sculpture, and different arts, films, or…’ (ibid). All in all, the Israeli occupation was considered by the participants to be the ‘cause for all the excesses against the dignity of the Palestinian person and the violation of his muqaddasāt’ (ibid). Thus an explicit connection is made between the presence of the Palestinians and the Israeli occupation. Accordingly, “price-tag” constituted a direct threat to the Palestinians.

In opening the conference, Father Geries Khoury, president of the Liqa Centre, reiterated the notion of the “attacks” against churches and mosques taking place under the protection of the Israeli army; ‘the goal of these acts is to burn our unity and the sanctity of our personal security,’ and classed these attacks as ‘conspiracies.”

The other speakers likewise connected these “muqaddasāt” with the Palestinian identity and presence. The Greek Catholic Melkite bishop of Haifa, Elias Chaqour (Ilyās Shaqqūr) asserted that ‘the muqaddasāt are the symbol of our Palestinian identity,’ and that Palestinians had been defending them for sixty-four years (ibid). The representative of the governor of Bethlehem, ‘Abd al-Fatāḥ Ḥīmāyil, stated that Palestinian pluralism should be a model for the world and ‘the Palestinians meet under the roof of their nationality (waṭaniyya)’ (ibid). Bishop ‘Aṭāʿ Allāh Ḥannah labelled the “offenses” and “price-tags” ‘colonial plans aiming to divide Palestinian unity into communities (tawāʾif) and parties’ (ibid). In addition, he reminded Palestinian Christians of their connection to the country; ‘We, as Eastern Christians in this country, we have a close belonging and connection to this Holy Land in which Lord Jesus Christ (Yasūʿ al-Masīḥ) lived and in which everything was presented to humanity’ (ibid). Finally, the director of the Islamic-Christian Authority for the Protection of Jerusalem and Sacred Places, Ḥannah ‘Īsā, made Jewish clerics responsible for these acts, reasoning that they play ‘a big role in educating Jews to violence’ (ibid).

880 Calam 1. 4 October 2012.
This conference once again hints at the connection between Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank. It expressed more vividly the threat which “price-tag” – expressed through the desecration of religious places – allegedly posed to the very presence of Palestinians. It was viewed as a consequence of occupation and as being promoted by it.

**Summary of Section 4.1**

Overall, “The Innocence of Muslims” was viewed as an offense and was very often framed within the context of “price-tag,” which in itself was considered a threat to the Palestinian presence and identity. In this regard, there seems to be an elaborate discourse, as hinted at by the various discussions over “religious symbols” and “muqaddasât.” These actors viewed themselves as the embodiment of the Palestinian plight. To some extent, this Palestinian context was viewed as a model. Yet these discourses also only demonstrated limited awareness of a decreasing and threatened Palestinian Christian presence.

4.2 Arab-Israelis: An Indivisible Component of the Palestinian People

In Israel, “Arab Israeli” reactions to the film were generally clearly dominated by leftist parties, such as the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, rather than by Islamic and Islamist movements, like the Islamic Movement which was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. This section will first look at the reactions of Israeli officials (4.2.1), then at statements by “Arab Israeli” organizations and leaders (4.2.2), then at protests and, finally, at a joint Christian-Muslim protest in the city of Shefa Amr (Shifāʿ ʿAmr) (4.2.3). This section relies in particular on reports by the leftist Arab Israeli newspaper, *al-Ittihād*.

4.2.1 Official Israeli Reactions

Both the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior publicly denied allegations arising from early reports by the Western media which suggested the involvement of an American-Israeli citizen, “Sam Bacile,” in the production of “The Innocence of Muslims.” On September 12, the Israeli minister of the Interior denied that “Sam Bacile” was a holder of Israeli nationality. The deputy foreign minister, Paul Hirsch, insisted that the ‘film’ had no connections with Israel and condemned “The Innocence of Muslims.”

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In addition, *al-Quuds* reported on the condemnation of the video by Michael Melchior, whom the newspaper described as an ‘Israeli rabbi.’ *Al-Quuds* also introduced Michael Melchior as the former deputy foreign minister, former minister of social affairs, and as a supporter of interreligious dialogue (ibid). Michael Melchior additionally holds the honorary title of Chief Rabbi of Norway. In his statement, Michael Melchior stated that he expresses himself ‘in my capacity as a Jew and an Israeli rabbi,’ and condemned the film for being ‘indecent.’ Interestingly, he did not deny the involvement of Sam Bacile, who ‘defines himself as a Jew and an Israeli.’ He particularly condemned the insulting language used in this video. Furthermore, Michael Melchior considers the video an offense against millions of Muslims and against ‘the prophet of Islam, Muhammad.’ Interestingly, the rabbi rejected the pretence of freedom of speech, and viewed it instead as an ‘indecent and wicked’ abuse of this ‘freedom of expression and right to criticise [,which are] are two of the most sacred principles of democracy.’

4.2.2 Statements by Arab Israeli Leaders

This subsection comprises the official statements of the Greek Orthodox priest Gabriel Naddāf on September 14; the Latin priest Amjad Ṣabāra; the president of the district of Nazareth, Rāmiz Jirāyiṣī, on September 14; MP Muḥammad Baraka on September 14; the Communist Party and the Democratic Front of Haifa on September 21; as well as the MP Ḥannā Swayd on September 21.

In his condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims,” Father Gabriel Naddāf relied on theological arguments to counter what he called ‘the film’ and ‘the immoral work.’ He insisted on the Gospel’s prohibition of ‘despising and insulting any human being,’ thus equating the human being with the sanctity of religion, and asserting that Christianity and Jesus Christ were equally targeted by this video, also referring to the *The Da Vinci Code* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Interestingly, although the priest mentioned his love and respect for his ‘Muslim brothers,’ he stated: ‘Christians will defend Islam and Muslims as long as [underlined by the author] we live in one society,’ ‘we are in one line against any human being who tries to ignite strife.’ The theological connection between Islam and Christianity is not framed in terms of shared values, but rather through reminders that Christianity is mentioned in the Quran. In addition, Gabriel Naddāf called on the United Nations, and especially on the UN Security

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Council, to issue a law criminalising such offenses similar to an alleged law forbidding Anti-Semitism.

The Latin priest of the church of Our Lady in Nazareth, Father Amjad Şabāra, condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” as ‘offending and attacking the Islamic creed’ and for ‘attack[ing] the sanctity of religions and human dignity.’

In his condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims,” the mayor of Nazareth and member of Hadash, Rāmiz Jirāyīsī sits situated his criticism within a nationalist framework. On September 14, al-Ittihād reported that Rāmiz Jirāyīsī published a statement in which he ‘harshly condemned any practice that offends or violates religious symbols and creeds,’ in particular the latest ‘film’ ‘offending (yusī’) the prophet Muhammad and the Islamic religion.’ Furthermore he considered it ‘racist,’ and he rejected any attempts to justify it, stating that the video was produced under the pretence of freedom of speech but only led to more ‘hatred, tension, conflicts, and violence.’ Interestingly, the mayor then went on to examine the current situation in the region, which faced ‘continued occupation, colonization, and the denial of rights to Palestinians,’ and is allegedly bearing witnesses to an increase in hatred directed at Arabs and Palestinians. This statement is interesting as it shows how the offense of a religion is criticised in non-religious, non-sectarian, and national terms; from this reaction it is unclear whether Rāmiz Jirāyīsī is Christian or Muslim.

In his comment on “The Innocence of Muslims” published on 14 September 2012, in al-Ittihād, MP Muḥammad Baraka focused more on the background of the video. Although stating that he would not justify the killing of the US ambassador in Benghazi, he nevertheless asserted that he did understand the anger. He considered the video in particular ‘an attempt […] to offend Islam and Muslims and ignite a cosmic fire’ to further Islamophobia and justify US control. Interestingly, the deputy viewed the video as ‘targeting me personally.’

The joint statement issued by the Communist Party and the Democratic Front (Hadash) in Haifa likewise framed the criticism of “The Innocence of Muslims” in a nationalist context, within an anti-colonial and leftist framework. This statement was published on September 21

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886 Rāmiz Jirāyīsī is a member of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality and was elected mayor of Nazareth in 1994 by the municipal council, into which he was first elected in 1978. In addition, in 2009, he was elected chair-person of the Committee for Arab local authorities. In Facebook. Ramiz Jaraisy - رامز جرايسي سياسي. Doi: https://ar-ar.facebook.com/Ramiz.Jaraisy/info/?tab=page_info (retrieved May 16, 2016).
887 Al-Ittihad. 14 September 2012.

Page 5.
by *(al-Ittihad)*.\(^{889}\) It referred to the video as ‘a film of strife and provocation,’ ‘this shameless offense,’ ‘offending’ ‘all Arabs, Muslims and Non-Muslims, civilised humanity.’ Furthermore, the two parties criticised the film for having been produced under the pretence of freedom of speech and, in this regard, they roundly denounced the United States for not forbidding it. Yet the Communist Party and the Democratic Front saw in the timing of this crisis the true goal of the video: to sow conflicts and colonialism. They especially warned against:

Someone [who] tries to plant discord and fuel sectarian strife between the Arab and Islamic peoples; as all plans of strife have done, whether between Christians or Muslims, between Sunna and Shia, to divert the people from the true enemy, dragging [them] to the innovation [called] “the clash of civilizations.”

Accordingly, this rhetoric was used to justify the war on Afghanistan, Iraq and the ‘division of Syria on a sectarian basis.’ In this context, the two parties were able to connect the issue of this video with the Palestinian issue: ‘The Arab Palestinian people whose rights, dignity, and sacred Islamic and Christian places have been violated.’

The MP Ḥannā Swayd and member of the Democratic Front\(^ {890}\) invoked similar reflections and criticisms of colonialism and the West in his statement condemning “The Innocence of Muslims.”\(^ {891}\) Overall, Ḥannā Swayd considered the video an “attack” by “the West” on Arabs as a whole and not on Islam alone, and when discussing his theory, he employed the terms of classical Islamic theology, as will be shown below. Lastly he moved on to discuss the situation of Christians in the Arab world. Tellingly, Ḥannā Swayd entitled his article “The Defence of Islam and Arabism: Not Only Important for Muslims!!”

Ḥannā Swayd initially provides a short overview of the video; an “artistic” production,’ opposing ‘Islam and the personality of the noble prophet,’ and its spread on modern media. However, Ḥannā Swayd then goes on to expresses his idea that this video actually seeks to target the ‘Arab umma’ in order to control it. As part of this argument, he establishes a genealogy of similar events, such as the *Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, or the so-called Danish cartoons. The terms Ḥannā Swayd uses in this regard are surprising. For instance, Salman Rushdie is introduced as a ‘Muslim, foreign non-Arab (*muslim aʿjamī ghayr ʿarabī*) [underlined by the author].’ The so called Danish cartoons are introduced as ‘Danish, European

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\(^{891}\) Swayd, Hanna. 21 September 2012. لِيَسْ مِهمَّةِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَحَدَهُمِ. *(al-Ittihad)*. Malhaq al-Jumʿa. Pages 4 and 5.
(faranjī) [underlined by the author] cartoons.’ In the first two examples, the author uses old-fashioned terms such as a’jamī and faranjī, the first distinguishing between Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims, used first and foremost for Persians in late Umayyad and early Abbasid times, while the second word is an old-fashioned term used to designate Europeans. Another interesting quote can be found in his description of the background of the video’s producer, Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā, as ‘a film-producer of Coptic Egyptian origin (min aṣl misrī qibṭī) [underlined by the author].’ This quote suggests the absence of sectarian logic in the Palestinian case, even though this might be rather non-intentional here. The expression “of Coptic Egyptian origin (min aṣl misrī qibṭī)” implies that (original) national belonging prevails over religious affiliation, but that, in fact, the author no longer considers Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā a “true Egyptian.” This statement is interesting when compared with reactions in Egypt, in particular, where the makers of the video were almost systematically referred to as “Copts of the diaspora.”

The deputy sees the West behind all these acts and he accuses it of allowing such practices under the guise of freedom of speech. Ḥannā Swayd particularly denounces the double standard in the West which promotes freedom of speech on the one hand while simultaneously limiting it on the other. He cites the theory of evolution, climate change, and any criticism of ‘the Israeli policies of occupation and colonization’ as examples which prove the limits of freedom of speech in the West. He does, however, warn against generalization, as there are ‘liberal circles’ in the West. Interestingly, the idea that ‘The capitalist system is behind every devil wind’ reminds the reader that Ḥannā Swayd hails from a leftist, communist background.

While the article condemns the video and provides a detailed criticism of Western practices of freedom of speech, it is also an article about Christians in the Arab world, whom he refers to as ‘Arab Christians’ (al- masiḥiyūn al-ʿarab). In so doing, Ḥannā Swayd also promotes the concept of “Arabism.” He provides the reader with his own definition of Arabism or “Arab civilization:” ‘as a firm civilization that refuses submission,’ which ‘formed the greenhouse and the nurse for Islam and the prophet Muhammad.’ Thus, quite naturally, MP Ḥannā Swayd acknowledges Islam and Muhammad, ‘son of Abdullah, who is undisputedly considered the greatest Arab figure the Arab community (al-umma al-ʿarabiyya) has produced over time.’

Interestingly, when evoking this Arab community or nation, Ḥannā Swayd refers to a neutral concept, “umma,” used, for instance, in the Pact of Medina which established the rights and duties of its citizens. In a similar manner, Christianity is defined as a genuinely Arab religion; ‘the Arab Christian sacred places (muqaddasāt) and symbols.’ At the same time,
Hannā Swayd again uses old-fashioned Islamic terms, such as ‘the Lord Christ and Nazarene symbols (rumūz nasrāniyya) [underlined by the author],’ a term which is rarely used, if not rejected, by Arab Christians.

Interestingly, nothing in this article seems to discuss or try to justify either the Arab identity of Christians in the Middle East or the question of their belonging. The approach taken by this article seemingly implies that Christians inherently belong to the Arab community. The MP likewise establishes a history of coexistence at the very beginning of this article: ‘The Arab Christians are witnesses to the tolerant Arab civilization.’ Yet, Hannā Swayd appears to question the loyalty of Christian Arabs, as he calls on them: ‘[because of] their loyalty to their community (umma), they must defend them […] And be at the forefront of the ranks to fend off the agitators of Islam, Arabism and the Arabs.’

This question of the loyalty of Christian Arabs is discussed at length by Hannā Swayd. He raises the question of the position of Christian Arabs on the Arab Spring (which he does not refer to as the “Arab Spring,” but rather as a ‘popular movement’), and in particular on the war in Syria. Furthermore, Hannā Swayd raises the issue of the clashes between Copts and Muslims in Egypt and the attacks on churches in Iraq. He discusses a number of theories, such as the notion that Christians allegedly rely on the West, a concept he rejects; and the suggestion that the West is aiming to empty the Middle East of its Christians in a collusion between ‘Western colonialism’ and ‘takfiri Islamist […] forces,’ something, he states, ‘I do not believe in.’ Lastly he mentions the situation in the Palestinian Territories and Israel, in particular the attack on the monastery of Latrun, the burning of pages of the New Testament, the ‘distortion of the figure of Lady Mary on TV programs,’ and concludes ‘[these are] practices we are used to.’ However, Hannā Swayd does not consider such events “attacks” against Christianity; ‘rather, these sacred places and symbols are subjected to attacks and distortion in their fundamentally Arab Palestinian being.’ As a result, in the name of Palestinian Christian Arabs, Hannā Swayd concludes: ‘We stand with our community (umma).’

In mentioning the “offenses” against Christian and Muslim religious symbols and contents, MP Hannā Swayd defined Arabism as the sole framework within which to comprehend these “offenses.” The identity and belonging of Palestinian Christians to the Arab community is not discussed. Due to their inherent, nay biological belonging to this community,
Palestinian Christians likewise condemned the video. Yet while he used terms typical of classical Islam, he did not use modern terms and concepts such as “waṭan” at all.

4.2.3 Protests

The media only reported on two protests in Israel. The first one was staged by the Islamic Movement in Tel Aviv, where a dozen members of the northern, more radical branch, protested on 13 September 2012 at the US embassy.\textsuperscript{895} The second protest took place in the northern city of Acre after Friday prayers on 14 September 2012.\textsuperscript{896}

In addition, there is a report about one single joint Christian-Muslim protest, which took place in the mainly Arab Israeli city of Shefa Amr (Shifāʿ Amr). This city is an important “Arab Israeli” city which has witnessed a case of Jewish extremism. In August 2005, the Israeli soldier Eden Natan-Zada took a bus to Shifāʿ Amr where he killed four Palestinians and wounded seventeen more.\textsuperscript{897} He was immediately lynched by local inhabitants of Shifāʿ Amr and six people were prosecuted for their involvement in Zada’s killing (ibid).

This protest was organized by Hadash, i.e. the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality on Saturday 15 September 2012 and reportedly gathered together more than one hundred people from the city, among them high-ranking political and religious figures who delivered speeches.\textsuperscript{898} In particular, \textit{al-Ittihād} reported that the protest was led by the MP Muḥammad Baraka, presented here as the leader of Hadash, and whom we mentioned in a joint Christian-Muslim conference in section 4.1.3; Nāḥiṣ Khāzīm, the governor of the district Shifāʿ Amr; his deputy Jīrīs Ḥānnā; his deputy Aḥmad Ḥamdī; as well as most of the members of the city’s municipal council. Furthermore, the newspaper reported that the leader of the Druze community, Shaykh Yūsif Abū Ābīd; the governor Nāḥiṣ Khāzīm; MP Muḥammad Baraka; Father Fuʿād Dāghir; the secretary of the professional associations of Western Galilea, Ḥāṣīb Abūd; a member of the charitable society Elderly Home, Nāyif Āliyān; and Father Bissām al-Dayr all delivered speeches during this protest.

However, there are several videos related to this protest that display a somewhat different picture. These videos suggest that the protest was attended by no more than a few


\textsuperscript{897} The Electronic Intifada. 23 December 2013. Community which confronted Israeli killer suffered years of harassment. Doi: https://electronicintifada.net/content/community-which-confronted-israeli-killer-suffered-years-harassment/13033 (retrieved May 16, 2016).

\textsuperscript{898} Al-Ittihād. 16 September 2012. شفاعمو موحدة في التنديد بالفيلم المسيء للنبي العربي والإسلام. Page 5.
dozen people, also comprising a few women and Druze clerics, and was held on a street corner, where passing cars sometimes made the speeches difficult to understand. Furthermore, to some extent the protest seemed to be organized by amateurs, for example, the person holding the microphone could not remember the name of the priest speaking, Father Bissām al-Dayr.

Al-Ittihād begins by reporting on the speech the Druze imam, shaikh Yūsif Abū `Abīd delivered at the protest. In this short speech, he underlined that ‘Islam, its prophet and its teachings are too big and too great for an offending film to harm it,’ and formulates an idea that will be mentioned in other speeches: ‘violating the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) […] is violating the whole humanity.’ Yūsif Abū `Abīd also opened his speech by addressing the audience as follows: ‘In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.’ Furthermore, he seemed to allude to the involvement of ‘Copts of the diaspora’ in this video.

Al-Ittihād subsequently reported that the mayor of Shifā’ Amr, Nāhiḍ Khāzim, delivered a speech. Nāhiḍ Khāzim likewise welcomed his audience with the Islamic formula ‘al-salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatuahu wa barakātuhu,’ and ended his speech with this same formula. The mayor framed the ‘film’ in a broader context of repeated ‘unjustifiable’ attacks, ‘the logic of hate,’ ‘inhumanity and non-respect for the other’ that has likewise affected the other religions in the past, in particular ‘our Lord Christ (sayyidunā al-masih)’ and ‘our Lord Moses (sayyidunā Mūsā).’ In this regard, the video is also an opportunity to focus on the importance of Muhammad, ‘the most noble messenger (PBUH) who gave this great law (tashrīʿ) to humanity,’ ‘vastly superior, higher and bigger,’ ‘this great human being,’ ‘the original noble Arabic prophet.’ In contrast to this video, he saw the protest in Shifā’ Amr as ‘supporting the truth, humanity, and respect for different religions.’ In addition, Nāhiḍ Khāzim expressed the need to avoid generalization, by stating that the producers and writers of this video only represented themselves.

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899 YouTube. 15 September 2012a. الشيخ يوسف ابو عبيد في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية بحق الرسول عليه السلام. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kjc94x4rSw (retrieved May 16, 2016);
YouTube. 15 September 2012b. كلمة الرئيس ناهض خازم في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية بحق الاساءة للرسول. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVi0GbBBZs4 (retrieved May 16, 2016);
YouTube. 15 September 2012c. كلمة النائب محمد بركة في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية للإساءة للرسول عليه السلام. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ40KovCWGc (retrieved May 16, 2016);
YouTube. 15 September 2012d. كلمة القس فؤاد داغر في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية للإساءة للرسول عليه السلام. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5DTrsIE62g (retrieved May 16, 2016);
YouTube. 15 September 2012e. كلمة الاب بسام دير في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية للإساءة للرسول عليه السلام. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZI_QbWqJw4Q#t=60 (retrieved May 16, 2016).

900 YouTube. 15 September 2012e. السنة التحتية. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZI_QbWqJw4Q#t=60 (retrieved May 16, 2016).

901 Al-Ittihād. 16 September 2012. السنة التحتية. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZI_QbWqJw4Q#t=60 (retrieved May 16, 2016).

902 YouTube. 15 September 2012. كلمة الرئيس ناهض خازم في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية بحق الاساءة للرسول عليه السلام. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ_lQbWqJw4Q#t=60 (retrieved May 16, 2016).

903 YouTube. 15 September 2012. السنة التحتية. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZI_QbWqJw4Q#t=60 (retrieved May 16, 2016).
By contrast, in his speech MP Muḥammad Baraka insisted that the video sought to sow strife, especially in Egypt.\(^ {904}\) Muḥammad Baraka was born in 1955 and is, in addition to being deputy in the Israeli Knesset, the leader of the “Arab Israeli” party Hadash (Democratic Front for Peace and Equality).\(^ {905}\) In 2015 he retired from politics and faced charges of perjury. Like the other speakers, Muḥammad Baraka did not mention the video by its title, but rather as ‘this film,’ and insisted in particular that the video was part of an ‘American plan in the region’ to produce ‘sectarian strife in Egypt.’\(^ {906}\) Thus, he particularly criticised the attempts of the US Administration to distance itself from this video. Yet he did not say anything about the video’s background, instead emphasising that the video has ‘no connection with […] Muslims, it has ‘no connection with […] Christians, it had no connection to the Jews, it has no connection to […] any religious human being.’ Interestingly, Muḥammad Baraka did not introduce a sectarian logic into his vision to counter the video but instead insisted on the Arab Palestinian identity shared by all participants; ‘the Islamic civilization and the Arab belonging are at the centre of our belonging and with regards to us, Arabs, and Palestinians…,’ and on the conviction that this was not a religious or confessional matter but rather a ‘human issue […] we defend humanity.’ A few times the deputy used colloquial expressions such as ‘mish ʿārif,’ “I don’t know.”

Interestingly, the Episcopal priest of the Church of Saint Paul,\(^ {907}\) Fuʿād Dāghir, did express a strong sense of unity among the participants in this protest, but did so through the use of a sectarian logic and while systematically distinguishing between Christians, Muslims, and Druze.\(^ {908}\) For instance he introduced the idea of an offense against religious symbols this way: ‘Any evil perpetrated against a religious symbol, be it by Muslims, by Christians, by Druze, or even be it by Jews,’ and continued anyone ‘who offends the Messengers offends us, and anyone who offends Christ offends the Muslim, anyone who offends the Muslim offends the Druze,’ anyone ‘who lays hands [yamuss] on the Muslim, lays hands on myself myself, as a Christian, anyone who lays hands on Christ, lays hands on the Druze, and anyone who lays hands on the Druze, lays hands on the Muslim.’ As a result, the counter-reaction to this video took place in solidarity: ‘We are together […] Muslims Druze and Christians.’ The idea of being ‘one united voice (ṣawt wāḥid)’ is repeated three times. This solidarity went even further as the priest stated:

904 YouTube. 15 September 2012c. كلمة النائب محمد بركة في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية للإساءة للرسول عليه السلام.
905 Al-Jazeera. محمد بركة.
906 YouTube. 15 September 2012c. كلمة النائب محمد بركة في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية للإساءة للرسول عليه السلام.
908 YouTube. 15 September 2012d. كلمة القس فؤاد داغر في التظاهرة الاحتجاجية للإساءة للرسول عليه السلام.
because we, Christians, Druze, Muslims, we share the same spirit, the same religion, the same God (ilāh), the same creed and the same symbol.’ This declaration of a complete religious and spiritual assimilation is very interesting. Interestingly, Father Fu‘ād Dāghir used several colloquial expressions, such as ‘mish maqbūl,’ or the “b-” before a verb, in his pronunciation.

Ḥasīb ’Abūd likewise made use of a sectarian distinction to express unity. Ḥasīb ’Abūd is the president of the Western Galilee branch of the Israeli workers’ union. In his speech, he defined this protest as one comprising ‘the people of this city in their different communities standing as one impenetrable dam’ against ‘all offending thoughts.’ He added that ‘all prophets, and places of worship are red lines.’

Nāyif ‘Aliyān, a member of the charitable society Elderly Home, called on everyone in the country to condemn the ‘film.’

Finally, in his speech, the Latin priest Bissām al-Dayr, expressed his belief in coexistence, ‘al-taʿāyush’ and ‘al-ʿaysh al-mushtarak,’ which explains the participation of Christians in this protest, since ‘We condemn this film which offended our Muslim brothers who stood with us.’

The banners carried during this protest bore among other statements: ‘The Front and the Communist Party condemn the offense against Islam and its Messenger!’ ‘The offense of Islam and its Messenger is rejected by all of us, inhabitants of Shifāʿ Amr; Christians, Muslims, and Druze,’ ‘Any offense against the truth of religious creeds and thoughts is an offense against every one of us!’ and included accusations of the video being an ‘American production.’

When asserting the cross-sectarian condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” in the city of Shifāʿ Amr, the speakers resorted to different strategies to express solidarity and unity. They either posited diversity as a starting point and subsequently insisted on unity, even

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909 Al-Arab. 29 May 2005. (http://www.alarab.com/Article/461611 (retrieved April 11, 2016)).
910 Al-Ittihad. 16 September 2012. Page 5. (http://www.almosenin.org/ (retrieved May 16, 2016)).
913 Father Bissām al-Dayr was the priest of the Saint John church in Shifāʿ Amr from 2009 to 2014, and was subsequently sent to Jordan. In Latin Patriarchate. 5 August 2014. (http://ar.lpj.org/2014/08/05/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%88-%D9%8A%D8%A8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%B3-%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AF/ (retrieved May 16, 2016)).
914 YouTube. 15 September 2012.
915 YouTube. 15 September 2012.
suggesting theological assimilation, or they established a shared Arab and Islamic identity and rejected the sectarian logic.

**Summary of Section 4.2**

Unlike the reactions in the previous section (4.1), the reactions in Israel were dominated by lay people, and particularly by left-wing actors. Interestingly, the few clerical reactions there suggested a much stronger sectarian discourse that distinguished between Christians, Muslims and Druze – the same distinction Israel makes. Most significantly, in some cases it is impossible to define the religious affiliation of the actors. These were the actors who insisted more strongly on the Arab, Palestinian identity.

**4.3 Gaza: The Competition for the Leadership against the “Zionist Enemy”**

There have been relatively few public reactions in Gaza and no joint Christian-Muslim reactions at all. These reactions comprise approximately three protests and five political statements, which show a certain competition between Hamas and other Islamist movements in the defence of Islam.

Approximately four protests took place on September 13 and on September 15, 2012. Before that, the spokesman of the ruling Hamas, Fawzī Barhūm, condemned the video “The Innocence of Muslims” on his Facebook account. He considered the film ‘offensive,’ as well as ‘odious, racist and extremist, and an insult to all Muslims in the world and a provocation of their feelings,’ resulting in more hatred directed at Muslims.

On September 13, one protest took place. Haaretz reported that a dozen people protested near the UN building, burning American and Israeli flags and chanting “‘Death to America! Death to Israel.’” Furthermore, the protesters also reportedly burnt photographs of the producer of the video. The protesters are also said to have carried the flag of the Movement of Popular Resistance (ḥarakat al-muqāwama al-shaʿbiyya), an Islamic group that emerged in 2000 during the Second Intifada and which refuses the Oslo Accord(s). On September 13, al-Quds reported that the Movement of Popular Resistance staged a protest during which

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918 Al-Jazeera. المقاومة الشعبية في فلسطين. Doi: http://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/movementsandparties/2014/2/10/%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86 (retrieved May 16, 2016).
pictures of Terry Jones were burnt. The protesters reportedly chanted ‘fidāk yā rasūl allāh.’ In addition, the movement’s spokesman, Khālid al-Azbaṭ, stated in his speech that the ‘film’ displayed a ‘clear American-Zionist policy of offending Islam in any way possible.’ Thus, the information given by these two newspapers suggest that they reported on the same protests, staged by the Movement of Popular Resistance.

On September 15, al-Ḥayāt al-Jadīda reported on two protests; one under the leadership of Hamas and the second one in southern Gaza, under the leadership of Islamic Jihad. Al-Ḥayāt al-Jadīda reported that the minister of Islamic Endowments in Gaza, Ḳismaʾīl Raḍwān, delivered a speech in front of the building of the Palestinian legislative council in which he accused “The Innocence of Muslims” of aiming to stir up ‘sectarian strife.’ Interestingly, he asserted that ‘the Nazarenes (al-naṣārā) and the Muslims refuse the offense of the Messenger.’ Thus, on the one hand, the Hamas official seemed to be speaking of a certain solidarity between Christians and Muslims, while on the other hand he employed the term “Nazarenes” which is quite unusual for the Palestinian context. Furthermore, Ḳismaʾīl Raḍwān called for a boycott of American products and emphasised that solidarity was the best reaction. On 15 September 2012 al-Quds also reported that Ḳismaʾīl Raḍwān had asserted during this protest that the film was a proof of ‘the American-Israeli hatred of humanity,’ and had stated the impossibility of remaining silent on this issue.

In its report on a protest in southern Gaza led by Islamic Jihad, al-Ḥayāt al-Jadīda reported that two leading members of the group gave speeches. In both speeches, Islamic Jihad directed its criticisms against the “West.” Thus, Abū Ṭarīq al-Madalal asserted that ‘there is the West where the crusade (al-salībiyya) allied itself with Zionism to offend Islam and its Messenger Muhammad (PBUH)’ which is a ‘result of the hatred moving in their hearts.’ Furthermore, Abū Ṭarīq al-Madalal accused the West of using its freedom to actually offend Islam. He went on to call on Muslims to counter this video and to take responsibility for defending Islam. Similarly, Muḥammad al-Hindī, a member of Islamic Jihad’s political office, denounced the “West,” stating that the video was not about Muhammad but rather ‘reveals the face of the West which speaks all day long about democracy and human rights.’ Both speeches

connected the West and the hate it allegedly cultivated for Islam. In addition, Muḥammad al-Hindī described Muhammad as having ‘enlightened the world with justice, mercy and ethics.’

On 15 September 2012, al-Quds reported that Ismāʿīl Haniyya had called for continued protests in his Friday sermon.\textsuperscript{923} Interestingly, in the same sermon he also called for the protection of the ‘Christian brothers.’

**Summary of Section 4.3**

All these reactions show a clear anti-Zionist, anti-Israeli and anti-Western stance, these enemies being allegedly motivated by their hatred of Islam. In this regard, there are no significant differences between Hamas, the Movement of Popular Resistance, and Islamic Jihad. However, Hamas, as a political ruler, fashioned itself as the protector of Christians.

**Conclusion to Chapter 4**

The type of actors who reacted to “The Innocence of Muslims” and their level of mobilisation varied greatly. In Jerusalem and the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority was the most vocal and sought to mobilise others. In this context it was the churches who expressed their position on this video. By contrast, in Israel the reactions were dominated by lay actors and, most importantly, by leftist, not Islamist, actors. In Gaza, Hamas competed with other Islamist actors to lead the way against the video. Despite this, the overall level of mobilisation in Gaza was limited.

Overall, “The Innocence of Muslims” was mainly viewed as an “offense” and also as a racist act. Interestingly, the video was regarded differently in each of the three political contexts. In the context of Jerusalem and the West Bank, the video was eventually connected to the issue of “price-tag,” whereas in Israel some Arab Israeli actors considered it to be targeting all Arabs. In Gaza the video was viewed as yet another “attack” by the West on Islam. Some actors in both the West Bank and Israel viewed the video as aiming to stir up strife between Christians and Muslims.

Interestingly, most actors remained vague on the subject of the video’s background, and the involvement of Copts was little discussed. Instead, the video was connected to the Israeli occupation, the alleged colonial aspirations of the West, or “Zionism.” As a result, the criticism of Western double standards and of the pretence of freedom of speech were recurrent themes in all three contexts. Many actors demanded an international law prohibiting the production of

\textsuperscript{923} Al-Quds. 15 September 2012. تظاهرة غاضبة في القدس ضد الإساءة للرسول والإسلام الشرطة الإسرائيلية تتصدى لها بالقوة. Number 15479. Page 3.
content offensive to religions. The counter-arguments were sometimes framed in interesting ways; the Latin Patriarchate framed its criticism in a moral context, while some Arab Israeli actors did not make use of a religious wording, but rather of a national, Palestinian wording.

Interestingly, there were limited efforts by Christian actors to dissociate Christians from this video. Thus, few Christian actors claimed to be speaking in the name of all Christians. Instead, some Christian lay actors asserted that it was a duty for Christians to show solidarity with Muslims. Thus, the positions of the Christian actors illustrated a progression from a symbolic condemnation to a more elaborate stance. A later discussion between the author and the Latin bishop of Amman suggested that a key drive behind the Christian condemnations was the potentially violent Muslim reactions.

As far as Muslim attitudes towards Christian positions are concerned, Muslim actors did not seem to express an expectation towards Christians to react. Instead, various representatives of the Palestinian Authority praised the condemnations made by Christians. Interestingly, Hamas leaders defined themselves as protectors of the Christians. Similarly, the Christian presence in the counter-reactions also varied greatly. In Jerusalem and the West Bank, the joint Christian-Muslim reactions took the form of conferences, while in Israel one such reaction took place under the leadership of Hadash.

Interestingly, there was no Christian-Muslim reaction in Gaza. To some extent, “The Innocence of Muslims” provided an opportunity to define the Palestinian societies in the West Bank and Israel as a model and to praise Christian-Muslim relations there. Accordingly, this peaceful coexistence rested on a deeply-rooted shared history, on having faced the same difficulties in the context of the events of 1948, and on the on-going occupation of the West Bank, as well as on the same Arab Palestinian identity. Some stances recalled certain selected events in the past, such the birth of Jesus Christ, the ascension of Muhammad to heaven, and the pact between Caliph ʿUmar and Patriarch Sophronius. A number of actors emphasised the deep solidarity and mutual respect between Christians and Muslims. Yet some actors regarded this coexistence as a simple matter of fact, like the Melkite priest in Bethlehem who is also the only actor who included Jews in his depiction of religious coexistence. All in all, the discussions about Christian-Muslim coexistence suggested a clear link between a person’s status as a cleric or layperson and the sectarian approach to unity. As was shown, the dominance of lay actors in the criticisms of “The Innocence of Muslims” displayed the near complete absence of a distinguishing sectarian discourse. Interestingly, in one stance, Muhammad was defined as the
“prophet of mercy” and Jesus Christ as the “prophet of love.” Ḥannā Swayd suggested that Muhammad is also important for Christians.

Chapter 5 Jordan: A Model of Coexistence under the Hashemite Leadership

Introduction

In the context of “The Innocence of Muslims” the case of Jordan was unusual. Unlike any other country analysed – Egypt, Lebanon, the West Bank, or Israel – there were no Christian-Muslim reactions. Thus, a key issue addressed by this chapter will be the understanding of this absence. The chapter starts by looking at the official Islamic reactions – the government and the institutions of the state. It will then look at the Christian reactions and finally, at those of various political and social actors.

Despite the visibility of their churches and the high numbers of Muslims attending Christian schools and hospitals (Chatelard 2004, 21), analyses on Christians in Jordan are scarce (Chatelard 2009, 1). Christians have played a core role in the economy and the politics of the country since before the creation of the state of Transjordan and then, later on, in Jordan.

Building a Nation

There are varying estimates regarding the proportion of Christians both of Palestinian and “East Bank” origin; 5.5% according to Bernard Heyberger (Heyberger 2013, 15-17); 4% according to Géraldine Chatelard and Antoine Fleyfel (Chatelard 2009, 2; Fleyfel 2013, 80); and only 3% according to Latin Bishop Mārūn Lahḥām and 'Āmir al-Ḥāfī, the vice-director of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies. The number of Palestinians in Jordan is estimated at approximately 60% of the population. In addition, there are Chechen and Circassian minorities.

In the nineteenth century, the territory now comprising Jordan was at the margins of the Ottoman Empire. Christians were an integral part of the tribal system. As a result, there was a lot of assimilation. Christians reportedly did not consume pork and alcohol, and Jean Louis Burckhardt reported on Muslims baptizing their children (Rogan 1999, 38). In this context,
Eugene Rogan speaks of greater religious tolerance than in other parts of Ottoman Syria and Palestine. However, the Ottoman reforms began to affect the marginalised Transjordanian areas which were re-integrated and re-administrated by the Ottoman state (Anderson 2005, 15). In addition, an emergent new merchant class also proved to be an important actor in bringing about change (Rogan 1999, 121). Another factor was the appearance of Christian missionaries – foremost Latin, Greek Catholic Melkite, and Protestant (POC 1997, 285) – in these areas that continued to be neglected by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Consequently, the previously homogenous Greek Orthodox Christian community was divided into several Christian communities (see below).

The Emirate of Transjordan was established in 1921 with the support of the British who installed Abdullah (ʿAbd Allāh), an offspring of the Hashemites on the throne (Massad 2001, 11). Although the elite initially comprised Arabs from Syria, Palestine, and the Hijaz (Anderson 2005, 42), something which led to revolts in the 1920s, Christians were quickly promoted into high-ranking positions because of their high level of education (POC 1997, 285). In the 1920s and 1930s the new rule forced nomads to settle (Massad 2001, 56) and a number of factors led to the destruction of the Bedouin economy and the complete dependence of the tribes on the state (Massad 2001, 59).

In 1948, Transjordan annexed the West Bank and its population grew by 300%, from 375,000 to one million people (Massad 2001, 226). The war in 1967 led to the flight of another 300,000 Palestinians to Jordan (Schwedler 2006, 43). The Gulf War in 1991 and the expulsion of Palestinians from Kuwait resulted in the return to or settlement of 150,000 Palestinians in Jordan (ICG 2005, 4). The annexation of the West Bank, which was economically more developed than Transjordan, caused severe upheavals in the “East Bank.” As a result, the fault lines in Jordan are not so much along religious lines, but rather along “ethnic” lines. Luisa Gandolfo describes Jordan as ‘a large extended family and in times of crisis, it becomes a small, beleaguered tribe’ (Gandolfo 2012, 108). In particular, the idea that Jordan could become a country of “substitution” (al-waṭan al-badīl) for Palestine has caused controversies in recent years. The Hashemites have both silenced this issue (Schwedler 2006, 134) and used it as a means to assert their authority and prevent the emergence of competing groups (Hermann 2000).

Islamic Legitimacy

According to Quintan Wiktorowicz, the Hashemites draw their political and religious legitimacy from three factors. Firstly, they are descendants of the Qurayshī tribe, which is
affiliated with Muhammad (Wiktorowicz 2001, 49). Secondly, the Hashemites guarded Mecca from 1201 to 1925, and thirdly, the Hashemite monarchy is the protector of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (ibid). In addition, the Hashemites participated in the Great Arab Revolt in 1916 and this also enhances their legitimacy. As a result, the Hashemite kings have promoted a depoliticized, ritualistic interpretation of Islam (Wiktorowicz 2001, 46, 77).

In addition, the Hashemites have been very active and vocal in promoting interreligious and inner-Islamic dialogue. Under the leadership of the former crown prince, Prince Hassan bin Talal (al-Hasan bin Ṭalāl), the concept of “wasaṭiyya,” “moderation” or “median,” was promoted (Chatelard 2004, 276). Furthermore, in 1981 Prince Hassan bin Talal founded the Al Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought to promote interreligious dialogue. In 1994 he founded the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, an inter-disciplinary institute, which published material mostly concerning Christianity in the Arab World (Reiss 2012, 315). Similarly, King Abdullah II (ʿAbd Allāh al-thānī bin al-Ḥusain), has promoted more initiatives with an international echo, particularly the “Amman Message” and “A Common Word.” The Amman Message was released in 2004 during Ramadan by the king himself to promote inter-Islamic dialogue and tolerance and to limit the calls to takfirism (declaring a Muslim an aspotate). As stated on King Abdullah II’s website, the “Amman Message” is a result of the ‘historical responsibility of the Hashemites, as descendants of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), to uphold and defend the faith.’ In particular, the values of ‘tolerance, moderation and dialogue’ were put forward as truly Islamic principles (ibid). In October 2007, the Al Bayt Institute released another programmatic document “A Common Word Between US and You.” It was signed by 138 Sunni and Shia Muslim scholars and leaders from all over the world (Yazbek Haddad; Smith 2009, 369). The document was formulated in response to Benedict XVI’s speech in Regensburg and was a call to Christian leaders to mutual understanding (ibid). In particular, “A Common Word” established shared values in both the scriptures of Islam and Christianity for the love of God and one’s neighbour (Yazbek Haddad; Smith 2009, 371).  

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926 Kildani, Hanna. 8 April 2015. Personal Interview. Marj al-Ḥammām, Amman. This source is quoted in this chapter as “Kildani 8 April 2015.”


929 However, Johnny Awwad, professor at the Near East Schools of Theology in Beirut, criticised “A Common Word” for not depicting Christianity as Christians view it themselves. Instead, he stated that the document displayed a ‘Jesus [who] remains within the boundaries of Judaism’ (Awwad 2009, 78-79).
In recent years, however, there has been a growing Islamist tendency in Jordan. As will be shown below, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was established in 1945, has adopted a non-confrontational attitude that has allowed it to influence the ministry of education (see Section 5.3.1). In addition, there is also a growing Salafi spectre composed of different elements comprising a traditionalist, a quietist, and a violent outlook (ICG 2005, 5). Several factors have led to this development; proselytizing by Saudi Arabia, the war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), and growing economic problems.

**Politics and Economy: Tensions in the Making**

The year 1992 marked the beginning of both political and economic liberalisations. Yet, despite this political liberalisation, the Jordanian parliament has remained powerless due to uneven political representation. Thus “East Bank” Jordanians (as opposed to Jordanians of Palestinian origin) as well as ethnic and religious minorities are disproportionately represented in Parliament. Christians have nine seats while Circassians and Chechens have three seats (McCallum 2012, 13). This is a result of the king’s appointment of loyal East Bankers to the senate to counter-balance the lower house which was dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood (reportedly Palestinian dominated) and oppositional groups (Schwedler 2006, 48). Moreover, the 1992 agreement with the International Monetary Fund led to cuts in the public sector which most heavily affected “East Bank” Jordanians (ICG 2005, 47). However, the budget deficit has continuously increased, reaching 60% of the GDP in 2011 (ICG 2012, 10).

The Arab Spring took place on a small scale in Jordan. However, it was potentially a dangerous moment for the monarchy, since the traditional bases of the monarchy – the tribes and the army – were key actors in the protests. It subsequently included the Jordanian Palestinians, Islamists and unaffiliated young people, all united by the same demand to end the corruption (ICG 2012, 1, 8). Despite the tension over political representation, “East Bank” and Palestinian Jordanians both voiced the same calls for a new electoral law (ICG 2012, 6).

**The Christians in Jordan**

Besides the varying estimates regarding the proportion of Christians in Jordan, there are also varying estimates concerning the proportion each Christian community constitutes. In 2009 the Latin Bishop Mgr. Salīm al-Ṣāyīgh put forward the estimate of 42,000 Latin Christians in Jordan (Sayegh 2009, 85); in April 2015 Bishop Mārūn Laḥḥām asserted there were 60,000 Latins (Lahham 20 April 2015). Eleven Christian denominations are officially recognized in Jordan; the biggest is the Greek Orthodox Church, followed by the Latin Church (part of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem), the Greek Catholic Melkite Church, the Armenian Apostolic
Church, the Protestant Churches (Episcopal, Lutheran), the Chaldean Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the Maronite Church (Fleyfel 2013, 81). However, Géraldine Chatelard mentions the Lutheran and the Episcopal Churches separately instead of the Armenian Catholic Church (Chatelard 2009, 3). Wolfram Reiss noted that the Seven-Adventist Church and the Presbyterian Church were also officially recognized as of 2009 (Reiss 2012, 305). The highest-ranking Church leaders in Jordan are the Greek Orthodox Bishop, the Latin Bishop, the Greek Catholic Bishop, and the Armenian Apostolic Bishop. The bishops of the other churches reside in Jerusalem.

The Council of Churches (majlis ru’asāʾ al-kanāʾis fī l-urdun) was established in 1999 on the initiative of the four bishops of Amman; the Greek Orthodox Bishop, the Latin Bishop, the Greek Catholic Melkite Bishop, and the Armenian Apostolic Bishop (Kildānī 8 April 2015) and was recognized by the government as the body which would officially deal with Christian matters.930 As Ḥanna Kildānī explained, this council did not deal with theological matters but with every-day matters and the government. Jiryis Ḥabāsh, an Evangelical priest, criticised this council as not having any legal basis.931 The Council of Churches ceased to exist in late 2012 or early 2013. Various reasons were put forward for this; Fr. Ḥannā Kildānī recorded that the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem wanted to assume leadership in the council (Kildani 8 April 2015). Latin Bishop Mārūn Lāḥḥām, however, said that the council was not representative of Christians in Jordan, since the bishops of the other officially recognized churches, like the Episcopal church, do not reside in Amman and were therefore not member of it (Lahham 20 April 2015). As a result, the Council of Jordan and the Holy Land was established and is headed each year alternately by the three Patriarchs of Jerusalem; the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the Latin Patriarch, and the Armenian Apostolic Patriarch (Lahham 20 April 2015). All the churches in Jordan are represented in this new council except for ‘some Protestant churches’ (Lahham 20 April 2015).932

To some extent, the Christians constitute an important part of the Hashemites’ religious legitimacy. The monarchy envisions its dealing with the Christians in the tradition of Caliph

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931 Ḥabāsh, Jiryis. 28 April 2015. Personal Interview. Amman. This source is quoted in this chapter as “Ḥabash 28 April 2015.”

932 There is a certain conflict between the “traditional” churches and the “Evangelical” churches. In 2008, “traditional” churches designated Evangelical churches (which are not recognised) as a “foreign body” that allegedly harms inter-Christian and Christian-Muslim relations. Linga. 18 Februair 2008. هجوم شرس من الكنائس التقليدية على الكنائس الإنجيلية. Doi: https://www.linga.org/international-news/MTQ5Nw (retrieved May 21, 2016).
Omar (Chatelard 2004, 276). Christians have also constituted an important geopolitical asset (Fleyfel 2013, 95), since they confirm the Hashemites’ claim of embodying a moderate Islam. In 1964, during the visit of Paul VI, King Hussein defined himself as ‘guardian of the Christian Holy places’ (Katz 2005, 148) and in this role, Jordan has excavated and promoted numerous Biblical sites in Jordan (Katz 2005, 147). As Wolfram Reiss noted, in no other Arab country have the rulers so extensively acknowledged a Christian heritage (Reiss 2012, 318). Furthermore, the publication of Christianity in the Arab World by Prince Hasan bin Talal was highly important, as he insisted that the Christians were genuine and native inhabitants of the Middle East (POC 1997, 285).

In its dealings with religious minorities, the state has set up a confessional system based on a modernised Islamic understanding and on European minority rights (Chatelard 2009, 1). In 1938, Christian ecclesiastical courts were recognized alongside Islamic courts (Chatelard 2004, 146); the bishop is thus a judge in the first court (Shweihat 1992, 53). Moreover, as previously mentioned, a system of quotas guarantees a Christian presence in Parliament. However, as Bishop Mārūn Laḥḥām argued, these deputies are supposed to be the ‘Christian voice,’ yet in a conflict between the government and the Churches over the ecclesiastical courts, these same Christian deputies sided with the government (Lahham 20 April 2015). Unwritten tradition compels the king to nominate a Christian to the government; as of April 2015 there were even three Christian ministers.

Despite these positive aspects, negative aspects do exist, especially in the field of mixed marriages (Kildani 8 April 2015) and conversion (Habash 28 April 2015); both exist on a legal basis which favours Islam. Even though Christian-Muslim relations remain very good on a personal level, as emphasised Fr. Ḥannā Kildānī (Kildani 8 April 2015), decreasing numbers of Christians attend public schools (Chatelard 2009, 7).

5.1 The State: Promoter of a Moderate, Tolerant Islam

As outlined in the introduction, the Hashemite monarchy asserts a strong Islamic legitimacy and, in doing so, it heavily promotes its own understanding of Islam as a religion of “moderation” and “tolerance.” This section starts by analysing the reactions to the video given by the government, the ministry of Islamic Endowments, the dāʾirat al-iftāʾ, the Parliament, and a local council.

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933 Farraj, Bassem. 27 April 2015. Personal Interview. Amman. This source is quoted in this chapter as “Farraj 27 April 2015.”
The Government

The Jordanian government issued a reaction on 13 September 2012 through its official spokesman, Samīḥ al-Mu‘āyaṭa. The spokesman expressed the government’s condemnation of ‘offending and targeting the noble Messenger Muhammad (PBUH), especially the film distorting ḥanīf Islam and its noble message (al-islām al-ḥanīf wa risālatuhu al-samaha),’ further rejecting the ‘offense against the Islamic religion and any other religion.’ With regards to the video’s background, however, the government remained rather vague and only referred to ‘extremist mind-sets and circles which aim to produce strife (fitna).’ Besides the possible threats linked to this video, the spokesman of the Jordanian government also rejected the pretence of freedom of thought and speech, and announced that the government would demand that Google and YouTube remove the ‘offending film’ from their websites, what Google and YouTube eventually did. At the same time, the government also condemned the targeting of embassies. The video also seemed to have presented the spokesman with an opportunity to emphasise Jordan’s role in promoting a positive image of Islam. In particular, he insisted on the “Amman Message” which reflected ‘the wisdom of its leadership that moderation (wasaṭiyya) [underlined by the author], in its true concept, contributes to combatting extremism in all its forms.’ In addition, the spokesman asserted the government’s respect for all revealed religions.

The Minister of Islamic Endowments

The reaction given by the minister of Islamic Endowments, Islamic Affairs, and Sacred Places (muqaddasāt), 'Abd al-Salām al-'Abādī was published on 14 September 2012 in al-Dustūr and was cited using the words ‘the minister [...] said.’ In this article, 'Abd al-Salām al-'Abādī, who was minister for Islamic Endowments from 2005 to 2013, is said to consider the video ‘the American film which offends the person of the noble prophet Muhammad,’ ‘this abominable work,’ ‘this ugly crime and this open attack,’ ‘this outrageous work.’ Interestingly, the minister remained rather vague on the background of the video, attributing it to ‘hating minds,’ and ‘this small group.’ In addition, 'Abd al-Salām al-'Abādī accused the makers of the video, whom he placed in the same framework as those who drew so called Danish cartoons, of aiming to ‘provoke strife and trouble between people and (of) offending religions and creeds,’ as well as increasing hatred; ‘the fire of blazed up and burning hate that eats up the...
spirits of the people.’ Furthermore, he accused the video of crushing attempts at dialogue and mutual understanding, instead promoting hate which would eventually result in ‘terror [and] violence.’ As a result, ‘Abd al-Salām al-ʻAbādī demanded the prosecution of the makers of the video.

The minister started by speaking in the name of his ministry and then went on to speak in the name of all Jordanians regardless of their confession. Furthermore, he reportedly expressed the feelings of people in the Arab and Muslim world. When countering the video, the minister mainly referred to the Jordanian initiatives in promoting a positive image of Islam, in particular to the “Amman Message,” issued by ‘His Majesty King Abdullah II.’ In addition, he called for the honouring of decision made by the General Assembly of the United Nations dated 20 March 2008 regarding the respect of religions and in particular of Islam. Finally, he defined – very much in compliance with official Islam in Jordan as promoted by the monarchy – Islam as ‘a religion of mercy, humanity, tolerance, moderation, and balance [underlined by the author], a religion of justice and peace, a religion that condemned the contemporary meaning of terrorism.’

Dāʾirat al-Iftāʾ

In the same article in al-Dustūr dating 14 September 2012, the newspaper also mentioned the statement issued by the Fatwa council in Jordan, dāʾirat al-iftāʾ. The Council of iftāʾ is charged with issuing legal opinions, appointing the muftī of the army, the chief of Islamic courts, the muftī of Jordan, and the dean of the Sharia school at the University of Jordan (Wiktorowicz 2001, 72). In April 2015, it issued a statement forbidding membership of the so called Islamic State.

Dāʾirat al-iftāʾ condemned the ‘production of a cinema film offending Islam and the prophet Muhammad (PBUH).’ Like other official actors in Jordan, dāʾirat al-iftāʾ did not mention a clear background to the video, but ascribed it to ‘those who offend and their likes.’ All in all, it condemned the video for ‘being incompatible with religion and ethics,’ and a ‘call

937 دين الرحمة والإنسانية والتسامح والوسطية والاعتدال، دين العدل والسلام وأنه دين يستنكر المعنى المعذر للإرهاب
938 Al-Nahar. 13 April 2015. Doi: http://www.annahar.com/article/228787-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A1-%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
to strife, (to) foment sectarian conflicts, and hurt the feelings of Muslims,’ as well as an attempt to ‘depict [Islam] as an enemy by distorting and defaming it.’ Unlike the minister of Islamic Endowments, dāʿirat al-ıftāʾ defined itself as being part of ‘this Muslim, Arab country which relies on the Hashemite leadership honoured to belong to our Lord Muhammad.’ As a result, in its countering of the Hashemite monarchy, its Islamic legitimacy, and initiatives. In addition, Muhammad was defined as ‘the prophet, peace be upon him, [who] is perfect in his human attributes,’ ‘he joins in him the perfect attributes a human being cannot attain,’ ‘our Lord Muhammad, peace be upon him, he is perfect in all his attributes, acts and sayings, and the faith of a believer is incomplete unless he believes in that, as well as his two professions of faith [there is no God but God and Muhammad is His messenger].’ The greatness of Islam was further underlined by citing the Quran 61:8-9,940 which justified the council’s call to Muslims ‘to stand in one united line […] and hold fast on the principles of Islamic law and the fundamentals agreed upon.’ The dāʿirat al-ıftāʾ once again praised Islam by issuing a reminder of the inherent tolerance of Islam which compels Muslims to respect all prophets, messengers, and the other revealed religion. Here again, it quoted the Quran 2:285.941

The Parliament

On 14 September 2012, al-Raʿ y reported on a statement issued by the Lower House of the Jordanian parliament (majlis al-nuwwāb).942 In this statement, the deputies expressed their deep sorrow and strongest condemnation of ‘this offense (isāʾa) by a small, sinful group,’ ‘the attack on the tolerant [underlined by the author] Islamic creed and religious symbols,’ ‘such irresponsible behaviours.’ Furthermore, the MPs considered the video as an attack on ‘every Muslim, a personal offense against all Muslims, as it is on all human, spiritual and cultural values in the world.’ As a result, they called for a ban of this ‘film,’ the prosecution of Terry Jones, who reportedly supported the makers of the video, as well as the prosecution of everyone who participated in the production and promotion of the video. To some extent, the deputies did also defend Islam, defining it as a tolerant religion, since it ‘believes in all religions and revealed messages.’

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940 ‘They want to extinguish the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah will perfect His light, although the disbelievers dislike it. It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion, although those who associate others with Allah dislike it.’ Quran. Doi: http://quran.com/61/8-9 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
941 ‘The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], “We make no distinction between any of His messengers.” And they say, “We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination.’ Quran. Doi: http://quran.com/2 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
On 16 September 2012, *al-Dustūr* mentioned the condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” by the Jordanian Senate (*majlis al-a’yān*).\(^{943}\) In their statement issued on September 15, the senators condemned ‘these offending practices,’ ‘these hateful and abnormal practices,’ they considered an expression of ‘hate and enmity against Islam and Muslims.’ Furthermore, the senators viewed the video as a threat since it could have triggered ‘strife and conflicts between the followers of the revealed religions, openly threatening the principle of coexistence, peace, and dialogue between the peoples, civilizations and religions.’ As a result, the Senate called on the international community to condemn such practices. At the same time, however, the senate seemingly condemned the violent reactions, given that it called for ‘highly civilized [reactions] that embody the greatness of Islam.’ In this regard, the Upper House strengthened its statement by quoting two *hadīth* by Muhammad, ‘you are truly a great creation,’\(^{944}\) ‘I was sent to complete the noble attributes of morality,’\(^{945}\) and a verse from the Quran, ‘We have not sent you, [O Muhammad] except as a mercy to the world’\(^{946}\) (21:107).

**Al-Ṭafīla District**

On September 17, *al-Ghad* mentioned that the municipal council of Greater Tafīle (lajnat baldiyyat al-Ṭafīla al-kubrā) had issued a statement condemning “The Innocence of Muslims.”\(^{947}\) It condemned ‘the offense of the Messenger of God (PBUH) in the film that was produced in America.’ Yet, the council only vaguely referred to the background of the video; ‘a criminal small group,’ ‘this small group.’ In addition, the council considered the video a display of the ‘deep hatred’ felt by the makers of the video that made it impossible to remain silent on this subject. Interestingly, the statement dwelt at length on Muhammad: ‘the prophet of God (al-hādī) who came to all of humanity with a religion of tolerance, love, and balance

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\(^{944}\) "وأنك لعلى خلق عظيم"

\(^{945}\) "انما بعثت لأتمم مكارم الأخلاق"


\(^{947}\) Al-Ghad. 17 September 2012. لجنة بلدية الطفيلة تستنكر الفيلم المسيء للرسول الكريم. Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607214-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%AF-%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D9%84-%D8%A7-%D9%84-%D8%B7-%D9%81-%D9%8A-%D9%84-%D8%A9-%D8%A7-%D9%84-%D8%B7-%D9%81-%D9%8A-%D9%84-%D8%A9-%D8%A7-%D9%84-%D8%B7-%D9%81-%D9%8A-%D9%84-%D8%A9-%D8%A7-%D9%84-%D8%B7-%D9%81-%D9%8A-%D9%84-%D8%A9-%D8%A7-%D9%84-%D8%B7-%D9%81-%D9%8A-%D9%84-%D8%A9-%D8%A7-%D9%84-%D8%B7-%D9%81-%D9%8A-%D9%84-%D8%A9-%D8%A7-%D9%84-%D8%B7-%D9%81-%D9%8A-%D9%84-%D8%A9-

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Summary of Section 5.1

All these official stances mostly considered “The Innocence of Muslims” as proof of the hatred directed towards Islam. As a result, these official actors promoted a specific image of Islam, emphasizing its inherent tolerance, either by referring to the official discourse in Jordan or by underlining Islam’s recognition of Christianity and Judaism. Some actors mentioned the “Amman Message,” although this actually called for inner-Islamic tolerance and not interreligious dialogue.

5.2 Christian Reactions: Jordan as a Model

All Christian reactions, both by clerics and lay actors, are analysed in this section in order to underline the potential contrast with other reactions in which Christians were not explicitly mentioned.

5.2.1 The Churches in Jordan

This subsection comprises the reactions of the Council of Churches in Jordan, the Greek Orthodox bishopric, and the Council of Evangelical Churches in Jordan (the latter churches are not officially recognized in Jordan). The meeting of Latin bishops that took place in Amman from 17 September to 20 September 2012 and condemned “The Innocence of Muslims” also forms part of these Jordanian Christian reactions but was analysed in the previous chapter (see Section 4.1.1).

The Council of Churches in Jordan

On 14 September 2012, the Council of Churches in Jordan initially published a long statement condemning “The Innocence of Muslims.” According to the newspaper al-Ra’y this statement was issued by Ḥannā Kildānī, secretary of the council and Latin priest in the suburb of Marj al-Ḥammām. Father Ḥannā Kildānī, however, was the secretary of this council from 2010 to 2014 (Kildānī 8 April 2015).

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[underlined by the author] (dīn al-tasāmuḥ wa-l-maḥabb wa-al-i’tidāl),’948 and as ‘the seal of prophets and messengers.’949
This long statement starts by condemning the video. Interestingly, while the statement refers to the video by its title, it does not dwell on its background. In the very first lines of the statement, the council asserts: ‘If Muhammad is for all Arabs, then all Arabs are for Muhammad,’ thus expressing its avowal to Muhammad and goes on to insist on unity between Muslims and Christians in an Arab context. The second paragraph frames this unity in the context of the numerous initiatives undertaken by the Hashemites to promote Christian-Muslim dialogue. The third paragraph, however, alluded to the initiatives of the Roman Catholic Church towards Islam. At this point, the statement dwells more clearly on the background of the video, defining an American and Jewish background. Finally, the statement formulates another response to the video, by citing the shared theological values of Christianity and Islam. The statement also makes use of various rhetoric devices.

First of all, the statement mentions the video by its title; ‘an obscure cinematographic production in the United States […] the cinema film “The Innocence of Muslims.”’ In addition, it dwells at length on its understanding of “the film” saying: ‘in light of the ignominious crime,’ ‘a film offending (yusīʾ) the Messenger (ṣ), Islam and Muslims,’ aspiring to stir up ‘strife between the people and the states,’ connected to ‘the vice (ʿayb) that appears now and then by offending religions and the followers of the revealed messages.’ This idea of “vice” (ʿayb) appears in another position; ‘the film has a bulk of vice and shame (ār) and [shows the] fire of hell in the mind, heart of [those] who produced, promoted, showed, and supported it [the film].’ In contrast, the background of the video is not initially clearly mentioned; ‘a reckless individual who strives firstly to offend himself, his country, and his religion – if he has any religion at all.’ This unknown person is connected to ‘the followers of strife,’ animated by ‘their evil feelings,’ who had done similar things previously. Towards the end of the statement, the idea of evil motivations is underlined and explicitly connected to Americans and Jews: ‘Some Americans and Jews want us to leave and descend from their summits [peaceful coexistence] into the valleys of their loathing and the production of hate.’ This idea of a Western background is not further dwelt on, but the statement clearly works by holding a mirror comparing between the ‘supporters of strife (aṣḥāb al-fitna)’ and the ‘the followers of the revealed messages (aṣḥāb al-risālāt al-samāwīyya).’ The video seems to have given the council the opportunity to establish Jordan as a model whose legitimacy increases with the depiction of the video as a program of hate and division. Several rhetorical devices enhance this dichotomy between “good” and “evil.” First of all, the image of light and darkness is evoked: ‘however, nowadays, (he) who
refuses to live under the sun, and who is already addicted to living in the darkness of bogs of hate and loathing.’

Evil is associated with natural disasters; ‘the winds of defamation,’ ‘fishing in the clouded water.’

After having defined “the other,” we will now look at the “we” this statement frames. Here again, the text shows a progression. The first paragraph cites the belonging to the Arab and Islamic context; ‘our Arab and Islamic societies,’ ‘we Arabs, and groups of Muslims and Christians.’ More importantly, this paragraph clearly expresses a Christian avowal to Muhammad, in the third line of the statement, which supposedly explains the rejection of “The Innocence of Muslims:’ ‘if Muhammad is for all Arabs, then all Arabs are for Muhammad.’ Fr. Ḥannā Kildānī stated that he used this sentence when the chaplain of the Royal Court organized a Christian-Muslim meeting in 2006 during the crisis of the so-called Danish cartoons (Kildani, 8 April 2015). Ḥannā Kildānī asserted then that these Danish cartoons had likewise offended Christianity and that Christians had a long experience of offense, for example, *Jesus Christ Superstar* (ibid). In an interview with the author, he concluded: ‘for us [Christians], he [Muhammad] is a religious leader’ (ibid). In the second paragraph, the statement establishes a Jordanian framework of religious coexistence; ‘we, as Jordanian Christians […] our Muslim brothers.’ Yet, this framework occurs under the leadership of the Hashemite monarchy and in particular ‘at its top, His Majesty the great King Abdullah II.’ As a result, the “Amman Message,” the “Common Word,” “Al Bayt,” the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, and the “Week of Harmony between Religions” are mentioned. All these initiatives are fashioned as examples of ‘this national effort at openness and co-work.’ Thus, as early as this paragraph, Jordan is already defined as a model for Christian-Muslim relations. This idea of Jordan as a model, resting on a “virtuous triangle” between Christians, Muslims, and the Hashemite monarchy is one which is repeated in several other Christian reactions, as will be mentioned below. The third paragraph places the statement in a Latin framework, since it underlines the Vatican initiatives towards Islam. This clearly proves that the statement was written by a Latin priest, i.e. Ḥannā Kildānī. However, the statement does not underline the importance of the Second Vatican Council – as other Catholic reactions did in reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims” – but only mentions the Special Synod for the Middle East in 2010, and the visit by Benedict XVI to Lebanon from 15 to 17 September 2012. In particular, the statement emphasizes the good relations between Christians and Muslims that these two Roman Catholic

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952 من يرفض أن يعيش تحت الشمس، وقد ادمى العيش في عتامة مستنقعات الكراهية والحق.
953 هؤلاء المصطادة في الماء العكر.
initiatives reportedly underlined. In addition, the Council of Churches in Jordan quotes the final statement of the Special Synod for the Middle East:

We say to our Muslim citizens, that we are truly brothers, and God wants us to live together, united in the faith of the One God and the commandment of the love of God and the love of one’s Neighbour [underlined by the author]. Together, we will work on building civil societies founded on citizenship, religious freedom, and the freedom of creed. Together, we will cooperate to strengthen justice, peace, human rights, and the values of life and family. It is (truly) our shared responsibility to build our nations (awštāninā). We want to give the East and the West a model of coexistence between the various religions and of co-operation in building between the diverse civilizations for the good of our nations and the whole of humanity.

This long quotation stresses the shared theological values between Christians and Muslims. In this regard, the final statement of the Synod seems to express the core idea of “A Common Word,” which placed special insistence on the same faith in God and the command to love the other, i.e. the “neighbour” (see the underlined part in the quotation). However, this quotation is also a call to Muslims, reminding them of the shared monotheistic dogmas, the brotherhood, and, in particular, calling on them to commit themselves to build a secular and civil society. As a result, the quote seemingly lessens the impact of the previous paragraphs citing good Christian-Muslim relations. Nevertheless, the statement goes on to reiterate the idea of hatred embodied in the video “The Innocence of Muslims,” which results in its underlining of the very Jordanian model: ‘our response will be, we the Muslim and Christian Jordanian Arabs, the production of love and dialogue.’

Thus, to some extent, the core idea of the Council of Churches is that Jordan is the country most fit and legitimate to be a model, resting on the same monotheistic faith, a shared Arab and Islamic identity, and the leadership of the Hashemite monarchy. In addition, throughout this statement, this idea of sharing the same monotheistic creeds is pervasive; ‘in front of God, in the same boat’954 (first paragraph), the Common Word, ‘united in the faith in the One God’ (third paragraph, statement of the Special Synod for the Middle East), ‘accessing the mercy and love of God’ (fourth and last paragraph). This shared monotheist faith results in the same values of ‘love and dialogue, whose material we find in the verses of the noble Quran and the Holy Gospel.’ Finally, the statement quotes the Quran ‘the God of the worlds (rabb al-ʿālamān)’ and the gospel ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy’ (Matthew 5,7).

954 أَمَامَ اللَّهِ فِي قَارِبٍ وَاحِدٍ
All in all, according to this statement, Christian-Muslim coexistence rests on a certain sameness; on a common monotheism and shared religious values, as well as on the same identity, and not on a common history. Interestingly the statement does not feel compelled to defend Islam against the accusations levelled against it in the video. To conclude, this statement by the Council of Churches was seemingly motivated by a convinced rejection of blasphemy and not by the fear of violent backlash against Christians (Kildani 8 April 2015). Hannā Kildānī stressed that those responsible for this video did not represent Christianity. Moreover, the criticism is not based on a theological argumentation but on the experience of living together and coexistence in a society.

**The Greek Orthodox Bishopric**

On 19 September 2012, the Greek Orthodox diocese of Amman issued a statement condemning “The Innocence of Muslims.”955 The statement displays a progression; it starts by condemning the video, then goes on to dwell on Christian-Muslim relations in a broad context, and finally in the context of Jordan under the rule of King Abdullah II. In the name of Bishop Benedictos, the clerics of the diocese, and the parish the statement expresses its ‘complete condemnation and rejection of any form of offenses (isāʿāt),’ especially ‘the latest film which wanted to offend the person of the noble Arab Messenger,’ and ‘this fierce offensive,’ and ‘odious work.’ The statement does not dwell at all on the background of the video but only attributes it to ‘sides pursuing interest in the right (haqq) of the Islamic religion and its symbol,’ that only aim to ‘insinuate the spirit of division and spread strife among the people.’ As a result, the Greek Orthodox diocese considers itself and Christians to be likewise “offended” by this video. In addition, the video is viewed as targeting Jordan specifically, since it reportedly aims to ‘destroy national unity.’

In contrast to “The Innocence of Muslims” and its reported goals, the statement frames a unity between Christians and Muslims in Jordan that initially rests on: ‘in Jordan as sons of the united nation (abnāʾ al-waṭan al-wāḥid),’ who share the same historical roots: ‘and we have deeply-rooted roots and we have lived in shared prosperity equally between Muslims and Christians, without discrimination or differentiation.’ In an extension of the notion, this unity is stated to rest on the leadership of the Hashemite king, Abdullah II, for whose welfare the Greek Orthodox Church prays. Thus, the king is viewed as an inherent element of this Christian-Muslim model; ‘May His Majesty our King Abdullah II, son of Ḥusain, protect and preserve

the national unity and the love that governs the sons of this nation in its different sides." Interestingly, this statement made extensive use of words like “waṭan” and “sons of the united nation.”

Council of Evangelical Churches in Jordan

On 14 September 2012, the Council of Evangelical Churches in Jordan (majma’ al-kanā’is al-injīliyya) issued a statement condemning “The Innocence of Muslims.” This council comprises five Evangelical churches that are not officially recognized by the state, but are registered as “associations” (Reiss 2012, 305); the Free Evangelical Church (al-kanīsa al-injīliyya al-hurra), the Jordan Baptist Convention (tā’ifat al-kanīsa al-ma’amānīyya al-urduniyya), the Church of the Nazarene (kanīsat al-nāṣarī al-injīliyya), the National Christian and Missionaries Alliance Church (kanīsat al-ittiḥād al-masīḥī al-injīliyya), and the Assemblies of God Church (kanīsat jamā’at allāh al-urduniyya). Firstly, al-Ra’y invoked condemnation of the violent reactions in connection to the video. Secondly, the newspaper mentioned the council’s condemnation of any “offense (isāʾa) against any other religion.” The statement issued by the council did not seem to explicitly refer to a background to this video. However, in its insistence on the “offense” having no ‘connection to true Christianity,’ and statement that ‘those who are behind this film do not represent any Evangelical,’ the council appeared to acknowledge an Evangelical Christian involvement, perhaps referring to the priest Terry Jones. Thus, this statement can be considered an attempt to dissociate Jordanian Evangelical Christians from this video. In addition, the statement makes use of a discourse of national unity under the leadership of the Hashemite monarchy, in a similar way to that in which the Greek Orthodox diocese did:

We in Jordan, Christians and Muslims, we stand side by side, with a united view, and we will not accept the shattering of our unity, as one Jordanian people that lives in a country beloved in

956 حفظ جلالة ملكنا عبد الله الثاني ابن الحسين المعظم من كل سوء حافظا ومحافظا على الوحدة الوطنية والمحبة السائدة بين أبناء هذا الوطن.


958 Facebook. Council of Evangelical Churches of Jordan. Doi: https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A-Council-of-Evangelical-Churches-of-Jordan/529292477210732?sk=info&tab=overview (retrieved May 21, 2016).
our hearts under the leadership of the wise Hashemite leadership, led by His Majesty King Abdullah II.959

Summary of Section 5.2.1

These three reactions comprised both officially and non-officially recognized churches, both legal (Greek Orthodox Church) and lacking a legal basis (the Evangelical Churches). Yet all affirmed Jordan as a model of Christian-Muslim relations, animated by a “virtuous triangle” of the Christians, the Muslims, and the monarchy. The Evangelical churches demonstrated a strong need to dissociate (themselves) from the video.

5.2.2 Other Christian Organizations

This section will firstly analyse the reactions of four Christian organizations – the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Centre, the Orthodox Society, the Jordan Theological Evangelical Seminary, and the Arab Gathering to Counter Arab Christian Emigration –, then analyse local reactions and finally examine the reactions of Christian actors in Jordan.

The Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Centre

The director of the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Centre (al-markaz al-urdunī li buḥūth al-taʿāyush al-dīnī), Nabīl Ḥaddād, published two statements in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims;” the first one on 13 September 2012 and the second one on 22 September 2012. Nabīl Ḥaddād is a Greek Catholic Melkite priest in the middle-class suburb Marj al-Ḥammām near Amman. He is the founder of this interreligious centre, which is allegedly supported by King Abdullah II and mostly funded by US organizations (Neveu 2004-2005, 113). In the first statement, published on September 14 in al-Dustūr,960 the institute harshly condemned what ‘the media conveyed of a film offending (musīʾ) the prophet and the creed of Islam and violates the feelings of Muslims.’ It considered the video ‘this hideous suspicious work’ that was ‘beyond any moral, dogmatic, and human principle,’ which cannot possibly be justified by freedom and an ‘offense to sacred places (muqaddasāt), a disbelief in and a disobedience of rules of heaven.’961 The statement remained rather vague with regards to the background, ascribing it only to ‘a small group with hating minds and sick reasons.’ In particular, the centre was said to condemn the timing of this crisis, seeing in it an objective of

959 اننا في الأردن، مسيحيين ومسلمين، نقف جنباً إلى جنب في وجه متلحي الرأي ولن نقبل بزعزعة وحشننا كشعب أردني واحد يعيش في بلد عزيز على قلوبنا في ظل قيادته الهاشمية الحكيمة، وعلى رأسها جلالة الملك عبدالله الثاني
961 الإساءة إلى المقدسات كفر وعصيان لأوامر السماء.
‘igniting religious and sectarian racism.’ Furthermore, the statement formulated a complete solidarity with Muslims and stated that Christians – ‘we, as Arab Christians’ – were equally affected and offended by this video.

In the second statement published on 22 September 2012, in al-Dustūr, the position of the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Centre was expressed more clearly, this time by its director, Father Nabīl Ḥaddād.962 The priest repeated his condemnation of the video, defining it more explicitly as ‘the expression of a conspiracy,’ that only led to ‘planting evil and hate.’ Similarly, the statement considered the video to have been produced under the pretence of freedom, but this time it added that ‘freedom stops where it violates the others’ feelings.’ Moreover, Nabīl Ḥaddād appeared to have felt compelled to resort to a stronger argument in order to counter the video, and he insisted ‘our Christianity, in its teachings and its love does not [accept] the offense (isāʾa).’ Although, Nabīl Ḥaddād did not explicitly mention the background of the video, this insistence on the moral values of Christianity implicitly acknowledges a “Christian background.” Furthermore, he underlined the solidarity and unity between Christians and Muslims who are ‘one united team.’ As a result, this video likewise “offended” Christians, ‘especially Arab Christians.’ This unity rests upon a common history and Arab identity; ‘as it offended us as Christian Arabs, because we lived with Islam and Muslims, and shared in our history and civilization, and thus it offended our Arabism (ʻurūba).’ The priest demanded an international law prohibiting offenses against religions. Interestingly, Nabīl Ḥaddād did not specifically evoke the Hashemite monarchy or Jordan in order to fortify his stance. Yet, al-Dustūr begins its description of the priest by mentioning his call to Christians and Muslims not to adhere to strife, as if this video did represent a real threat. Finally, Nabīl Ḥaddād strongly underlined the role of his centre and himself in promoting interreligious dialogue. He stated that he was one of the first to promote the “Amman Message” abroad and his centre was one of the first to have invited high-ranking Islamic leaders, such as ‘ulamāʾ from al-Azhar.

The Orthodox Society

962 Al-Dustour. 22 September 2012. مختصون مسلمون ومسيحيون : الفيلم المشبوه مؤامرة على التعايش السلمي بين الأديان. Doi: http://www.addustour.com/16616%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%86+%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D9%86+%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85+%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85+%3A+%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85+%D9%85%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%87+%D9%85%D8%A4%D9%85%D8%B9+%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86.html (retrieved May 21 2016).
The statement published by the Orthodox Society differed greatly in its content and tonality. It was written by the founder of the organization, Raʾūf Abū Jābir (Farraj 27 April 2015) and published on 14 September 2012 in several Jordanian newspapers. The analysis here uses the original statement delivered to the author by the president of Orthodox Society, Bāssim Farrāj, in Amman in April 2015. The Orthodox Society was founded in 1993 following the Fifth Orthodox Conference in Amman (Farraj 27 April 2015) It is registered at the ministry of Interior (ibid). The organization is a key actor in the so-called Orthodox Issue.

In this statement, the Orthodox Society harshly condemns ‘the showing of the film which offends Islam and the Muslim brothers and assaults religious sites (maqāmāt) and the Islamic creed’ as well as ‘the feelings of Muslims and Christians.’ The expression “Muslim brothers” is repeated three times in the statement. The statement connected this video with the recent price-tag against the Latrun monastery, and concluded: ‘There is a Zionist plan targeting Christian and Muslim Arabs’ and aiming to ignite ‘strife between the sons of the united Arab community (abnāʾ al-umma al-`arabiyya al-wāḥida).’ In contrast, the idea of unity between Christians and Muslims was strongly underlined and rested upon a shared Arab identity and belonging, “abnāʾ al-umma al-`arabiyya al-wāḥida.” At the end, however, this unity was said to rests upon ‘coexistence (al-`aysh al-mushtarak) ‘in this good country’ under ‘the leadership of his Majesty King Abdullah II, son of Hussein the great.’ In addition, the Orthodox Society called on the international community and Arab governments to stop the showing of this video.

The Jordan Theological Evangelical Seminary

The Jordan Theological Evangelical Seminary was established in 1991 following the assumption that the reported 4% of Christians living in the Arab world are only actually Christians by label, and the organization, as an institute of higher theological education, thus aims to strengthen their Christian identity for the service of the societies they live in.

In a brief press communiqué published in al-Dustūr on 16 September 2012 and issued on 15 September 2012, the Jordan Theological Evangelical Seminary (JETS) (al- hay’a al-injiliyya al-thaqāfiyya fī l-urdun) strongly tried to dissociate itself from “The Innocence of Muslims.” It condemned ‘all sorts of offenses against religious rituals and creeds and the foundation that represents the essence of the believing human being.’ However, the organization went on to state: ‘We as Eastern Christians, we want to make it clear that we have
no relation to what happened,’ and expressed its support for the ‘coexistence (al-taʿāyush) and brotherhood in our Arab and Jordanian society resting on mutual respect.’

*Al-tajammuʿ al-ʿarabī li l-taṣaddī li-hijrat al-masīḥiyyīn al-ʿarab*

The position of the Arab Gathering to Counter Arab Christian Emigration (*al-tajamuʿ al-ʿarabī li l-taṣaddī li-hijrat al-masīḥiyyīn al-ʿarab*) was briefly mentioned in *al-Dustūr* on 14 September 2012. The organization condemned the video as an ‘offense against the noble Arab prophet and Islam’ and ‘a suspicious work,’ without dwelling on its background. Furthermore, the Arab Group considered it an ‘offense for all Christian and Muslim Arabs.’ Interestingly, the statement seemed to have been less positive than the other Christian reactions, as it formulated two calls. Firstly, it called on Christians and Muslims to ‘strengthen mutual understanding (tafāhum) and counter any racism and extremism.’ Secondly, it called on ‘all intellectuals of the community (umma) to stand united against extremism.’ In a longer press communiqué published by the press agency Petra, the spokesman of this organization, Tīsīr ʿImārī, insisted there was a ‘conspiracy’ behind this video, especially considering its timing close to the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks; to ‘spread discord and division and create strife in our Arab societies serving enmity between Muslim and Christian Arabs.’

**Local Christian Reactions**

The Jordanian media reported on the stances of three mainly Christian localities but did not specify the identity of these actors. These localities are ‘Ajlūn on September 15, Mādabā on September 16, and al-Fuḥays on September 18, 2012.

On 15 September 2012, *al-Dustūr* reported that ‘Christian actions (faʿāliyyāt) in ‘Ajlūn’ condemned “The Innocence of Muslims,” accusing it of being ‘a crime against the right (ḥaqq) of the Messenger (PBUH) and an explicit offense against Islam and Muslims’.

On 16 September 2012, *al-Dustūr* reported on a protest against “The Innocence of Muslims” by ‘Christian communities in the governorate of Mādabā.’ The protest reportedly

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condemned the ‘offense against any of the religious symbols,’ from ‘any source and whatever its goals are,’ and it considered the video ‘a distortion of the image of Islam and Muslims.’

In addition, on 18 September 2012, *al-Dustūr* reported on a statement issued the day before by ‘popular, official, and local actions of the city al-Fuḥays.’971 This statement is discussed in this section, because al-Fuḥays is one the few remaining mainly Christian cities in Jordan; 60% of its inhabitants are reportedly Greek Orthodox, while the rest of the city is inhabited by Muslims and Latin Christians. In addition, this statement included a long quote from the statement made by the Council of Churches. First of all, these activists reportedly condemned the video, alluding to it as ‘these suspicious attempts to distort the image of Islam,’ ‘a new crime against the truth (haqq) of the Arab Muslim prophet Muhammad, connected this time to the production of the film “The Innocence of Muslims,” ‘this seamy work,’ ‘these practices.’ The statement did not mention a background to the film but further criticised the video for its trespassing on ‘all boundaries of politeness, feelings and sensations,’ as well as for its aim of seeking to ‘plant strife in the world.’ In addition, in reaction to the video, the statement underlined the tolerance of Islam. Finally, in the middle of this report by *al-Dustūr* there is a long quote from the statement made by the Council of Churches:

The elements of our Arab and Islamic society are more aware of deceit, and stronger when resisting the winds of defamation, because we have in our religion, we, the Arabs, and the group of Muslims and Christians, something that renders us immune. We rise above the vice which appears from time to time through offending the religions under the unfounded pretence and abuse of freedom of thought.

**Christian Actors**

On 15 September 2012, *al-Dustūr* reported on the condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” by the Christian MP Riḍā Ḥaddād. Riḍā Ḥaddād is one of six Christian deputies in the Jordanian parliament. In his official position, he criticised the fact that the showing of this ‘film’ at this time represented ‘a great offense to the Messenger, peace be upon him, and his noble message and an offense to millions of Muslims.’972 Speaking in the name of Christians, he underlined their refusal of such “offenses.” Furthermore, he established Jordan as a counter-

971 Al-Dustour. 18 September 2012. Doi: http://www.addustour.com/16612/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%+D9%84%9A%D9%88%D7%8B5%D9%84%9D%86%+D8%A7%D9%84%8D%AA%D9%86%D8%AF%9A%D8%AF+%D8%A8%97%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%9D%85+%D8%A7%D9%84%9D%85%8B3%9D%8A%D8%A1+%D9%84%8D%81%B1%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%84.html (retrieved May 21, 2016).

model – ‘referring to the state of brotherly coexistence (ta‘āyush) between Muslims and Christians in this country which constitutes a model to be followed.’ And, given this unity, he posited the Arab identity of this country; ‘we Arabs, Muslims and Christians.’

Finally, al-Dustūr mentioned the stance taken by the social activist Nabīha Farḥān al-Samardalī who expressed the Christian Arabs’ condemnation (‘we as Arab Christians’). In this regard, she referred to the ‘excellent relations between Muslims and Christians [which] are a model for the whole world.’ In addition, she demanded the prosecution of the producer and writer of this ‘film.’

Summary of Section 5.2.

Overall, the reactions of Christian actors and organizations varied greatly from other non-explicit Christian reactions. Like the churches, these reactions insisted on a “virtuous triangle” between Christians, Muslims and the monarchy. All reactions remained vague with regards to the background of the video, except for the Orthodox Society, which invoked a “Zionist” plan. Interestingly, the Protestant actors felt compelled to dissociate from the video, thus suggesting a fear of generalization and that they have faced difficulties in finding acceptance as genuine Jordanian Christians.

5.3 Where are the Christians?

This section suggests rather tellingly the absence of joint Christian-Muslim reactions in Jordan. This section will first look at the official stances of the actors (5.3.1) and then at the protests (5.3.2). Yet this does not mean that Christians have no role to play in political parties, organizations, professional associations, and tribes. The reactions of the professional associations can be viewed as joint Christian-Muslim reactions, given the Christians’ economic role and therefore their presence therein (Farraj 27 April 2015). The title of this section rather suggests that unlike in other countries, the very distinction between Christians and Muslims was seemingly not made, and the video was not understood as needing an explicit Christian-Muslim response.

5.3.1 Political and Social Actors

This section will focus on political parties (5.3.1.1), professional associations (5.3.1.2), organizations (5.3.1.3) and tribes (5.3.1.4).

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5.3.1.1 Political Parties

Only three political parties published a statement condemning “The Innocence of Muslims.” These are the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood; ḥizb al-wasāṭ al-islāmī (Muslim Centre Party) and the ḥizb al-duʿāʾ.

The Islamic Action Front (IAF) was established in 1992 following the legalization of political parties (Schwedler 2006, 65). Both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front have a history of cooperation with the government and other political actors in Parliament (see Schwedler 2006, 88). The Muslim Brotherhood, called the Islamic Movement in Jordan (al-haraka al-islāmiyya), adopted the strategy of a “march through the institutions” and, according to Marion Boulby, it began to infiltrate the Ministry of Education in the 1960s (Boulby 1999, 84). This influence has resulted in increased social pressure (Fleyfel 2013, 88-89). Yet in 2007 the Christian ’Azīz Musāʿada was elected into the leading committee of the IAF. In general, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and the IAF view their relationship with Christians within an Islamic framework. Ziyād Abū Ghanīma, the spokesman of the Muslim Brotherhood, stated:

Islam is very clear on the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. We believe in Jesus Christ and Moses. We believe that Christians and Jews are the people of the Book (ahl al-kitāb) and we are ordered by God to behave very kindly to them (Boulby 1999, 131 in Schwedler 2006, 159).

Marion Boulby, however, argues that the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan envisions Muslim-Christian cooperation primarily in the framework of ‘exposing Zionist ambitions’ (Boulby 1999, 131 in Schwedler 2006, 159-160).

On 14 September 2012, al-Dustūr quoted a statement by the Islamic Action Front condemning the ‘American film offending the prophet Muhammad.’ It considered the video ‘screaming attacks on the right (ḥaqq) of the prophet of God, Muhammad, the whole Islamic community (umma), on all believers in religious and human values.’ Interestingly, to some

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974 Al-Jazeera. 20 February 2007. Doi: http://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2007/2/20/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%8A-%D8%B1%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
extent the IAF viewed the “Innocence of Muslims” in the context of the phenomenon of price-tag in the Palestinian Territories, since it expressed its condemnation of all ‘offenses (isāʾāt) […] of our religious symbols that happen from time to time in occupied Palestine, the United States and in Europe.’ Nevertheless, the party asserted the importance of ‘peaceful and civilised’ reactions. Moreover, it called on the US government and on other countries to issue laws condemning such acts, as well as on Arab and Islamic governments to take a firm stance. Interestingly, this statement is very cautious and short, while the IAF, and especially the Muslim Brotherhood, participated in several protests (see Section 5.3.2) which also criticised the government.

The second party that published a statement condemning “The Innocence of Muslims” was ḥizb al-wasaṭ al-islāmī on 13 September 2012.\(^{976}\) This political party was established in 2003 by several Islamist-minded politicians who had rejected the Muslim Brotherhood’s growing dominance over the IAF (Schwedler 2006, 201). According to Jilian Schwedler, it is committed to pluralism, human rights, and social equality (Schwedler 2006, 201). Yet the al-Quds Centre for Political Studies mentioned that one of the principles promoted by ḥizb al-wasaṭ al-islāmī is the ‘need to change general principles towards Islam.’\(^{977}\) In the brief statement paraphrased by al-Dustūr, the political party condemned such ‘offending acts,’ aimed at ‘deepening the violence between the people.’ The party expressed its fear of violent reactions and demanded the suspension of the film’s spread. In addition, ḥizb al-wasaṭ al-islāmī defined Islam thus; ‘the tolerant Islamic religion is the religion of moderation and balance [underlined by the author].’ A member of this party reacted to the video as the leader of hamlat rasūl allāh yuwaḥḥidunā (see Section 5.3.1.3).

On 16 September 2012 ḥizb al-duʿāʾ published a statement condemning the ‘production of strife and evil through [this] offending film’ under the pretence of freedom of expression; ‘freedom does not mean offending others.’\(^{978}\) Muhammad was described in this statement as the ‘master of humankind,’ and Islam as ‘the true Islamic thought, standing on the pillar of

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\(^{976}\) Al-Dustour. 14 September 2012. 

\(^{977}\) Al-Quds Centre for Political Studies Doi: http://jpp.alqudscenter.org/ar/parties/view/48/%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8,%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7,%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A (retrieved May 21, 2016).

\(^{978}\) Al-Dustour. 17 September 2012. Doi: http://www.addustour.com//16611/%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84+%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%A8%20%281%29.html (retrieved May 21, 2016).
tolerance, moderation, balance, reason, love, and peace [underlined by the author].’ Interestingly this party, established in 1993, has Christians in its ranks and presented itself as a modern, open-minded party and, though lacking popular reach (al-Attiyat; Shteiwi; Sweiss 2005, 88), was the only political party which made a reference to Christians in the context of “The Innocence of Muslims.” The statement warned against ‘violating Islamic and Christian revealed dogmas because the followers of the revealed religions are an integral part of our Arab nation (umma).’ In addition, ḥizb al-duʿāʾ implicitly condemned the violent reactions, as it called for reasonable reactions. It also considered Islamic institutions in the West to have a role to play in explaining and promoting a positive image of Islam.

Summary of Section 5.3.1.1

The reactions of these political parties showed the adoption of the official discourse on Islam in Jordan, in particular the use of slogans like “moderation” and “balance.” Interestingly, the two Islamist parties did not mention the Christians, whereas ḥizb al-duʿāʾ did.

5.3.1.2 The Professional Associations: A Vocal Actor

Compared to the reactions of political parties, the reactions of professional associations provide a more articulate and in-depth reaction to “The Innocence of Muslims.” This suggests the on-going importance of professional associations in political debates.

Until the political liberalisation of 1992, professional associations were the place where political debate took place. Their establishment is closely linked to the war in 1948, when thousands of Palestinians subsequently fled to Jordan, and when the annexation of the West Bank caused a sudden modernisation (Dietrich 1999, 292). Moreover, most of the professional associations were established in the 1950s under the supervision of the government (Dietrich 1999, 292); the association of lawyers in 1950, the association of journalists in 1952, the association of engineers in 1957, the association of agricultural engineers in 1968 (Dietrich 1999, 294). Unlike trade unions, which were subject to repression, professional associations were able to assert their independence (Dietrich 1999, 294). This independence resulted among others factors from its strong membership, which is compulsory (Dietrich 1999, 297). At the end of the 1990s, they comprised 25% of the work force, i.e. 200,000 members (Hermann 2000, 59). The role of professional associations is said to have diminished since 1992 (Hermann 2000,
However, according to the journalist Fahd al-Khayṭān, their role has not changed, since people continue to view them as a substitute for political parties. The subsequent analysis does not hint at the actual importance of professional associations in terms of power, but rather at their continued visibility and the articulation of political discourse by these actors.

Various professional associations from across the country published statements condemning “The Innocence of Muslims”: the professional associations on 13 September, 2012 the professional association of lawyers on 16 September, Chamber Commerce on 15 September, the engineers after their meeting on 15 September, the association of journalists on 16 September, the association of lawyers on 16 September, as well as the professional associations of al-Salt, the professional association of teachers in al-Balqāʾ, and the association of agricultural engineers in al-Balqāʾ on 18 September. Furthermore, the association of agricultural engineers staged a sit-in in front of the building of the Counsel of professional associations, and the Imams and employees of the ministry of Islamic Endowments staged a protest on 17 September in the greater area of Amman, sāḥat al-nakhīl. The latter are mentioned here as part of professional associations because they are employed...
by the state and all mosques in Jordan are controlled by the government (Wiktorowicz 2001, 53-54).

In most cases, “The Innocence of Muslims” was considered a ‘film’ (the Professional Associations, the Journalist, the Engineers, the Agricultural Engineers in al-Balqā’) which was widely viewed as an ‘offense’: ‘to the prophets, the messengers, to the lords of the laws and the revealed religions’ (Journalists), ‘to all revealed religions in general and the feelings of Muslims in particular’ (Engineers), ‘to all Muslims in the world’ (Agricultural Engineers). In addition, the video was also considered a ‘provocation of the feelings of Muslims,’ ‘an evil and hateful act on the Messenger Muhammad, Peace be upon him’ (Lawyers), ‘an attack on the muqaddasāt and the values humanity cannot live without’ (Agricultural Engineers), ‘an assault on his noble person. They distort the image of his valuable life’ (Teachers al-Balqā’). In this regard, the video was viewed as a distortion of Islam; ‘a miserable attempt to distort the image of Islam by offending the Messenger sent to humankind’ (Lawyers). Interestingly, the video was also denounced for what it claimed to represent: a violation of human rights; ‘a screaming attack on the freedom of religion’ (Professional Associations Salt), ‘a screaming violation of the principles of freedom and the right to free speech’ (Journalists).

Thus, the video was also an opportunity for some associations to defend the image of Islam and Muhammad. The Chamber of Commerce underlined Islam’s tolerance; ‘Islam, which believes in all religions and all revealed messages.’ The Lawyers described Muhammad as ‘the gift sent the whole humanity and the mercy of the world in the message is the greatest that anchors the rules of peace and tolerance in the religion that God, praise to Him, has granted to all people, in order to lead them from the cult of the idols to the cult of God.’ This all-encompassing religion accordingly coexists with other religions (Agricultural Engineers).

As a result, the professional associations expressed various demands. Some associations expressed rather vague demands such as ‘a united Arab-Islamic position’ (Agricultural Engineers), and an end to ‘violating and touching religions’ (Chamber Commerce). In addition, the Arab and Islamic governments were called on to take measures condemning the video, to boycott countries allowing such offenses (Teachers in al-Balqā’), and to pressure the US Administration via its ambassador to Jordan (Agricultural Engineers). In addition, they also demanded an end to the showing of this film and other similar films and cartoons (Chamber Commerce, Journalists, Engineers).
The issues of the background of the video, Christian-Muslim relations and the threats resulting from this video are closely connected. First of all, most professional associations did not refer to the background of the video at all, except for the Chamber of Commerce which spoke of ‘hateful minds and circles,’ the Lawyers who spoke of ‘persons who hate,’ and the Imams who spoke of ‘the boldness of the Jews and the crusaders.’ In this regard, the Teachers in al-Balqā’ stated that the video was ‘part of a programmed war on Islam by the American and Zionist policy.’ In comparison, several professional associations referred to the potential threat arising as a result of the video; the Journalists considered the video a threat to peace and security in the world. Similarly, the Professional Associations in Salt viewed the video as aiming to sow sectarian strife, and a professor, Maḥmūd Abū Ghanīma, accused the video of aiming to divide the region and sow hate (Agricultural Engineers). In this regard, the protest of the imams displayed some self-criticism, since its media coordinator considered the video proof of the state of decay of the Muslim world, and called on the participants and Muslims to imitate Muhammad in their reactions (Imams). Similarly, the Engineers called on Muslims not to provide an opportunity to others to interfere in Muslim countries with their reactions.

Eventually, out of ten reactions, only two professional associations actually mentioned Christians in different ways. Firstly, the Professional Association asserted in its statement on 13 September 2012, that Christians condemned the video before Muslims did and it also rejected any generalization about Christians and Muslims based on a single act by an extremist. Thus the association implicitly conceded that the video had some “Christian background.” Similarly, it resorted to a theological argument in order to counter the video, stating the video did not represent Christian teachings. Secondly, during their sit-in, the Agricultural Engineers apparently referred to the content of the first part of the video, as they reportedly rejected its claims, and stated instead: ‘Muslims and Christians in this Arab country and Arab nation live on the same land, they have the same denominators which have connected them for a long time.’

**Summary of Section 5.3.1.2**

These reactions revealed that not only specific professional associations felt the need to express themselves on such a religious and non-economic an issue as “The Innocence of Muslims.” The reactions reached beyond mere condemnation and reflected a deep sense of
responsibility. Interestingly, when defending Islam, the professional associations did not make use of the slogans promoted by the Hashemites.

5.3.1.3 Organizations

This section comprises a heterogeneous range of organizations with both an Islamic and a secular outlook. To start with, we will look at the reactions of two Islamic organizations – al-muntadā al-‘ālamī li l-wasaṭiyya (the International Forum for Moderation), ḥamlat rasūl allāh yuwaḥḥidunā (the Campaign “The Messenger of God Unites Us”) – tajammu’ multaqī al-khatt al-sākhin (the Gathering the Forum for the Hot Line) established in 2011, and of the Jordanian Association for Human Rights (al-jam‘iya al-urduniyya li huqūq al-insān), as well as two local reactions.

On 14 September 2012, al-Dustūr mentioned a condemnation of “The Innocence of Muslims” issued by the International Forum for Moderation (al-muntadā al-‘ālamī li l-wasaṭiyya). This organization defines itself as an intellectual institution that promotes a moderate, open-minded understanding of Islam, the ‘elevation of Muslims’ as well as better understanding amongst Muslims and with other religions. 990 As of September 2015, the movement was led by the former prime minister of Sudan, al-Ṣādiq al-Mahdī, and comprised members from Sudan, Palestine, Jordan, and several other Arab countries. 991 In its statement published on 13 September 2012, the organization condemned the video as ‘this coward work.’ 992 Interestingly, the statement mainly focused on a means of countering this video. Firstly, al-muntadā al-ʿālamī li l-wasaṭiyya called on ‘those who are reasonable, the supporters of human rights, the people of wisdom to counter this cowardly work.’ Secondly, it called on Arab and Islamic countries to issue a statement forbidding such acts. Thirdly, the organization insisted on the need to defend the principles of Islam properly. To some extent, the statement also expressed the need for lobbying in Western countries.

In addition, al-Dustūr reported on a condemnation made by the organization “The Messenger of God unites us” (ḥamlat rasūl allāh yuwaḥḥidunā) on 14 September 2012. This movement was mentioned by the newspaper in 2008 as an organized and reflective Arab reaction which turned to Jordanian justice in order to obtain a prosecution against the makers

of the so-called Danish cartoons and the Dutch MP,\textsuperscript{993} Geert Wilders. In addition, the article also mentioned that ḥamlat rasūl allāh yuwaḥḥidūnā was established by former MP\textsuperscript{994} and former member of the hizb al-wasat al-islāmī,\textsuperscript{995} Zakaryā al-Shaykh, following the publication of the so-called Danish cartoons.\textsuperscript{996} In this long reference concerning the stance of this movement, \textit{al-Dustūr} initially mentioned the general stance of the movement; then the stance of its leader, Zakaryā al-Shaykh; and finally the stance of the legal advisor of the movement, Ṭāriq al-Ḥawāmī.\textsuperscript{997} First of all, it is not clear in which context ḥamlat rasūl allāh yuwaḥḥidūnā made its position on “The Innocence of Muslims” known, since the newspaper only wrote “the Jordanian ḥamlat rasūl allāh yuwaḥḥidūnā called on the American Administration and on all Western countries […]”. To some extent, the stance was a warning against the United States and Western countries to basically learn their lessons from the developments in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and Indonesia where the US embassies were attacked. Interestingly, as regards to the background of this video the movement clearly stated:

The spread of an indecent film that assaults the Lord of humankind, Muhammad (PBUH), that was produced by the American-Zionist Sam Bacile, supported by the Zionist American priest Terry Jones who has burnt a copy of the noble Quran, and by a number of immigrant Copts of Egypt in America.

Interestingly, the movement seemed to have relied on Western reports about the video rather than on Egyptian media. In addition, Sam Bacile was not considered a “Jew,” as Niqūlā Bāsilī Niqūlā initially described himself at first, but a “Zionist.” At the end of the article, the movement was also said to call for ‘a truly genuine Islamic Spring.’

In this report, the leader of the movement, Zakaryā al-Shaykh, was especially critical of the Western practices of ‘Western terror which provoke[s] the feelings of the Muslims,’ and in particular ‘the Western countries, led by the United States of America, the official patron of

\textsuperscript{993} Al-Dustour. 9 July 2008. 
\textsuperscript{995} YouTube. 21 April 2014. زكريا الشيخ عن إستقالته من حزب الوسط الإسلامي - بتول داني تيكا - زكريا الشيخ عن أنفطه من حزب الوسط الإسلامي. Doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Hsoz7deI-00 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
\textsuperscript{996} Al-Dustour. 14 September 2012. حملة "رسول الله يوحدون": بد العدالة الشعبية الإسلامية ستطال كل من يتطاول على رسولنا الكريم. Number 16227. Page 3.
\textsuperscript{997} Al-Dustour. 14 September 2012. حملة "رسول الله يوحدون": بد العدالة الشعبية الإسلامية ستطال كل من يتطاول على رسولنا الكريم. Number 16227. Page 3.
this politics of intellectual terror, of igniting strife and supporting the culture of clashes between the religions.’ In this context, the various reactions to the ‘The Innocence of Muslims’ were viewed as a logical consequence of these policies. In addition, Zakaryā al-Shaykh warned Arab and Islamic governments against crushing the protests, and overall he warned that the violent reactions could be misused to tarnish the image of Islam. Throughout his stance, the former MP used several expressions to describe Muhammad.\textsuperscript{998}

In contrast, the legal advisor of the movement, Ṭāriq al-Ḥawāmida, insisted on legal means as the best reaction; ‘the civilised legal reaction will be the strongest weapon in countering the calls to strife.’ He announced that ḥamlat rasūl allāh yuwaḥhidunā would establish a commission in order to consider the video. In addition, the Jordanian minister of foreign affairs was called on to take his responsibility in this matter, and he insisted in particular on the role Jordan had to play in the defence of ‘our religion and our noble prophet.’ In particular, this organization suggested a strong civil movement in Jordan that actively “defended Islam,” through peaceful legal means. Interestingly, ḥamlat rasūl allāh yuwaḥhidunā ascribed a “Zionist” and “American” background to the video and thus deviated from the many reactions in Jordan that did not evoke a background at all.

On 16 September 2012, al-Dustūr mentioned the statement by tajjamuʿ multaqī al-khāṭṭ al-sākhin. This movement was launched in 2011 on the initiative of a number of Jordanian figures aiming to achieve positive and safe reforms.\textsuperscript{999} It demands equality, dignity, freedom, and complete reforms for all citizens in Jordan (ibid). In addition, it insists on the right of return for Palestinians.\textsuperscript{1000} The movement is led by the (former) minister of culture Barakāt ‘Awjān.\textsuperscript{1001} Barakāt ‘Awjān published the statement in the name of the organization, expressing

\textsuperscript{998} Al-Madenah News. 7 November 2012. تجمع ملتقى الخط الساخن يطالب بصيغة توافقية على قرار رفع الدعم. Doi: http://www.almadenahnews.com/article/182722-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9-%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%82%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%BA%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%BA%D9%81%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85 (retrieved May 21, 2016).

\textsuperscript{999} Al-Bolsala. 12 September 2011. الخط الساخن يدعو إلى مؤتمر يناقش جدل الهوية الأردنية. Doi: http://www.albosala.com/News/Jordan/2011/9/21/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A5%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B4-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9?info=TWpRbVVHRm5aU1l4K3U=.plx (retrieved May 21, 2016).

his surprise at the stance of the Arab and Islamic states and therefore asking for a united Arab-Islamic position. He referred to the impossibility of remaining silent when faced with such ‘threats to the feelings of Muslims, in such a way.’ In addition, he underlined the importance of inter-religious dialogue and the respect of ‘creed and religion.’

On 17 September 2012, the Jordanian Association for Human Rights (al-jamʿiyah al-urduniyyah li ḥuqūq al-insān) published a statement condemning the video “The Innocence of Muslims.” This organization was established in 1996 and aims to protect and strengthen human rights in Jordan, but in compliance with the historical heritage of Jordan. In its statement, the Association for Human Rights harshly condemned the ‘appearance of an American film comprising extreme offenses (isāʾāt) against the messenger Muhammad (PBUH),’ ‘its essence vilifies the Islamic religion and mocks the values, the principles and the ethics of the noble Messenger,’ and considered its content as ‘sparking feelings of evil and religious hatred between humankind.’ It accused the video of sowing strife and hate when ‘religious coexistence’ was reportedly so much needed. Thus, the association demanded the punishment of the makers of this video. Yet it also condemned the violent reactions, in particular the murder of the US ambassador and the destruction of property, rejecting ‘all forms of violence and the spilling of innocent blood.’

On 18 September 2012, al-Ghad mentioned the condemnation of the video by ‘popular and official activities in al-Salṭ and the people of city al-Fuḥays’ who had published a statement condemning the ‘film’ the day before. The statement was said to consider the video an attempt to distort the image of Islam and a new attack on the ‘truth of the Arab, Islamic prophet.’ These two cities have an important Christian presence and these two reactions can therefore be connected with the three local Christian reactions in the previous section (5.2.2).

5.3.1.4 The Tribes

In the context of “The Innocence of Muslims,” two tribal confederations provided reactions to it; the coalition of Banī Ḥamīḍa, and the Tribes of the Tafīleh Governorate Province Demanding Reform. The Banī Ḥamīḍa is a confederation of semi-nomadic tribes who gradually

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1003 Guide to Civil Society in Jordan. الجمعية الأردنية لحقوق الإنسان. Doi: http://www.civilsociety-jo.net/ar/organization/447/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
1005 Al-Ghad. 18 September 2012. السلط: فاعليات شعبية ورسمية ترفض المساس بقيم الإسلام.
settled and live mostly in the area of the Wadi Mujib (Wādī al-Mūjib) (Alon 2009, 157). Overall, tribes have always played an important role in Jordan. Their power and wealth, however, varies greatly; the economic situation depends on their proximity to Amman and belonging to a big federation increases their access to wealth and power (Dietrich 1999, 117). In recent years, privatisation and budget reductions have decreased the importance of the tribes (ICG 2005, 5). Tribes used to have a “liberal” mind-set but have subsequently contributed to an increase in Salafi-Jihadi ideas (ICG 2005, 5).

In comparison to other actors in Jordan, the two tribes reacted to the video relatively late. On 18 September 2012, al-Dustūr mentioned the condemnation issued by the Coalition of Banī Ḥamīda (i ’tīlāf abnā‘ qabīlat Banī Ḥamīda) following its gathering in the house of the tribe’s co-coordinator.1006 The statement started by mentioning Muhammad; ‘this is the prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH), the mercy to the world and all that was created by God. He leads them from the darkness to the light.’ The tribe condemned the video by denouncing in particular the Western understanding of freedom, which ‘violates the feelings of others,’ and considered the film to be first and foremost a political act with no direct religious link. As a result, it considers it a duty towards ‘our beloved, our example, our lord’ to condemn and refute this video.

On 19 September 2012, al-Dustūr commented on the statement by the tribes of the Tafileh Governorate Demanding Reform, tajamu’ kāfat abnā‘ ʾashā’ir muḥāfaẓat al-Ṭafīla al-muṭālibīn bi l-iṣlah.1007 It condemned the ‘attempts to offend,’ ‘the production of a poor film attempting to offend the person of the Messenger (PBUH)’ produced by an ‘insignificant [person].’ Furthermore, it saw it as not representative of the ‘followers of the revealed religions.’ Instead, the statement recalled the foundation of Christian-Muslim relations, i.e. the “Omarian pact:” ‘We as Muslims, we do not complete our faith except through our faith in God, His books, His Messenger, where our brothers from the revealed religions lived and continue to live to among us. To them that which is for us and upon them which is upon us.’ This “community of rights and duties” is to be found in the Hanafi School which was a means of preventing the assimilation of Christians, preserving their autonomy and identity (Krämer 1995, 585).

1006 Al-Dustour. 18 September 2012. الأردنيون يواصلون التنديد بالفيلم المسيء للرسول.
1007 Al-Dustour. 19 September 2012. تәمت النذور لموافقه، والذين يشملهم الأشاعر الطفيلة}.
Summary of Section 5.3

This section illustrated the strong political visibility and activism of professional associations. The discrepancy of the reactions between the political parties on the one hand and the professional associations and some organizations on the other hand, showed that the political parties tended to adopt the official discourse on Islam and its slogans (“moderation”), whereas the professional associations tended to use another wording. This deviation from the official discourse was also clear when the West and sometimes a “Zionist plan” were invoked, an invocation which the official actors discussed in Section 5.1. did not make at all. “Christians” were hardly ever invoked, and if they were, then it was to underline the tolerance of Islam towards other “revealed messages.”

5.3.2 The Protests

This section will analyse the protests which took place in connection with “The Innocence of Muslims,” starting with Amman (5.3.2.1), then continuing with the northern governorates (5.3.2.2), then the centre (5.3.2.3), before finally ending with the southern city of Ma‘ān (.5.3.2.4).

5.3.2.1 Amman

First of all, the media reported on three protests in Amman. These protests were mainly organized by Islamist, even Salafi-Jihadi forces, among them the Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Al-Dustūr reported on two protests on Friday 14 2012. The first one started after Friday prayers at the Ḩusaynī mosque in downtown Amman. The march was organized by the Muslim Brotherhood and a number of ‘popular movements’ participated, among them leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Islamic Action Front. During the march, the US flag was burnt.

On that same day, a dozen supporters of the Salafi-Jihadi movement staged a sit-in at a mosque near the US embassy after Friday prayers. The gathering reportedly expressed slogans against the United States and Barack Obama and burnt an American flag. In addition, three leaders of this movement delivered speeches or made calls; Abū Muḥammad al-Ṭaḥāwī, Sa‘d al-Ḥanīṭī, and Abū Siyāf. In his speech at this protest against “The Innocence of Muslims”...

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1010 As of October 2014, Abū Muḥammad al-Ṭaḥāwī was in prison in Zarqa under extensive surveillance. In an open letter he had stated that the international coalition against the so-called Islamic State was a ‘satanic pact,’ and expressed his agreement with the organization. In Al-Quds Al-Arabi. 1 October 2014. ططحاوي: الدولة الإسلامية ليست "فجاعة" ولن أغير موقفي. Doi: http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=229164 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
of Muslims,” Ṭaḥāwī was simply quoted as having said: ‘what was made, was not the first act against Muslims.’ Besides this, Sa’d al-Ḥanīfī, introduced in this article as a leader of the movement, asserted that an excuse in such a case was not enough. Finally, another leader of the movement, ‘known as “Abū Siyāf,”’ reportedly called for a gathering near the US embassy, but some refused, and the sit-in was said to have split into two groups.

In addition to these two protests, Hizb ut-Tahrir (ḥizb al-tahrīr)1011 organized a protest on 17 September 2012, apparently in front of the public transport building.1012 Al-Dustūr reported that three speeches were delivered during this protest. A key leader of the movement, “Dr.” Nādir al-Tamīmī1013 stated in his speech that the video – ‘the offending film’ – did not only ‘expose the Messenger – PBUH – but also all Muslims.’ Therefore, he considered it a duty upon all Muslims to counter this video, insisting on the fact that ‘Islam is our history and our pride,’ and that this Muslim community is the best. In addition, a certain Dr. Dhīb ‘Abd Allah, whose identity was not further elucidated by the newspaper, called on ‘citizens’ to ‘return to the book of God, the Sunna of His noble prophet, and implement the law of God in all the aspects of our life.’ The gathering chanted slogans.1014 Furthermore, a participant condemned the ‘continued attacks and offensives against the Messenger,’ while a woman, called ‘Umm Badr,’ spoke in the name of women.

5.3.2.2 Northern Governorates

As far as the northern governorates of Irbid, Jarash, ‘Ajlūn and Al-Balqā’ are concerned, the media reported on eight protests that were organized by a broader range of actors than in Amman.

In the case of the outermost of the northern governorates, Irbid, we have found five protests in connection to “The Innocence of Muslims.” Two protests took place on Friday 14

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1011 The Hizb ut-Tahrir was founded in 1953 by the Palestinian Taqī al-Dīn al-Nabhānī who tried to register the organization at the Jordanian ministry of interior as a political party (Boulby 1999, 55), an application which was refused. However, membership of the Hizb ut-Tahrir is not forbidden Al-Ray, 29 September 2005. Doi: http://www.alrai.com/article_m/123023.html (retrieved May 2016). It is not very present in Jordan, more so since the Muslim Brotherhood was able to counter the competition from other Islamist groups, among them the Hizb ut-Tahrir (ICG 2005, 47).


1013 Nādir al-Tamīmī is a Palestinian and the son of one the founding member of the Hizb ut-Tahrir. He first studied at al-Azhar, then worked at the Jordanian ministry of Islamic Endowments, left, went to Saudi Arabia, but was forbidden from entering it again. In 1993 he joined the Hizb ut-Tahrir and played a role in the Palestinian revolutionary forces. In Facebook. Doi: http://nader-altamimi.com/AuxView.aspx?ID=171 (retrieved May 21, 2016). According to his Facebook page, his views are “moderate.”

1014 نحن فداك يا رسول الله.. هو الصادق الأمين.. صلى الله على محمد «لا إله إلا الله لا إله إلا الله.. نحن فداك يا حبيب الله»: «لا إله إلا الله.. نحن فداك يا حبيب الله».
September 2012. Following the Friday prayer, thousands of people reportedly marched and, according to al-Dustūr, called on others not to remain silent on the issue of this “offense” and on the Islamic states to take a firm position.1015 In contrast, al-Ghad reported on two protests in Irbid, one of them was organized by the “Popular Movement in the North” and the “Islamic Movement,” the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood.1016 Both protests not only condemned the video, but also demanded the removal of the US ambassador (ibid). In addition, the protest also criticised the government, demanding that it immediately to release its prisoners, implement reforms, and rethink its economic policy (ibid).

Similarly, al-Dustūr and al-Ghad reported differently on a protest on Friday 14 2012, in the outermost northern city of al-Ramthā.1017 According to al-Dustūr thousands of people joined a march, demanding a boycott of American and ‘Zionist’ products as well as the prosecution of the makers of the video, refuting the pretence of freedom of speech and human rights.1018 The gathering reportedly considered the video ‘an attack on the holiest of holy symbols (muqaddasāt) of Muslims’ (ibid). In contrast, al-Ghad reported that some five hundred people participated in this march that was staged by a ‘youth and popular movement.’1019 Two imams of the city reportedly delivered speeches and condemned ‘the violation of the person of the Messenger’ (ibid).

In the context of the district al-Koura (al-Kūra), once again there are two reports concerning a protest. Al-Dustūr reported on a sit-in in the locality Dayr Abī Saʿīd that was organized by the Muslim Brotherhood, the National Front for Reform (al-jabha al-waṭaniyya li l-īṣlāḥ), and local activists from the professional associations.1020 In addition, the newspaper


1016 Al-Ghad. 15 September 2012. مسيرات واعتصامات تندد بالإساءة للرسول الكريم. Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607354-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A9%D9%8A-


1018 Al-Ghad. 15 September 2012. مسيرات واعتصامات تندد بالإساءة للرسول الكريم. Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607354-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-

1019 Al-Doustour. 15 September 2012. مسيرات واعتصامات تندد بالإساءة للرسول الكريم. (retrieved May 21, 2016).

1020 Al-Doustour. 15 September 2012. مسيرات واعتصامات تندد بالإساءة للرسول الكريم. (retrieved May 21, 2016).
reported on a dozens of people who organized the sit-in but on no more than two hundred participants (ibid). Similarly, *al-Ghad* wrote that this sit-in was organized by the Muslim Brotherhood, the National Front for Reform, and the professional associations.\(^{1021}\) However, it also reported that the “offense” was ‘produced by the Jews’ (ibid).

The National Front for Reform (*al-jabha al-waṭaniyya li l-īslāḥ*) is the broadest pro-reform coalition in Jordan which comprises, informally (ICG 2012, 17), the Baathist progressive Party, the Socialist Party (ICG 2012, 17-18), the Islamic Action Front, leftist activists, professional associations, and independent opposition actors of both Palestinian and “East Banker” origin (ICG 2012, 7). According to its Facebook page, the movement demands a reform of the security institutions and a complete democratic reform.\(^{1022}\) In addition, it promotes the “right of return” and rejects the idea of Jordan as a “nation of substitution” (ibid). Furthermore, it defines “Zionism” as the main threat to Jordan (ibid).

Finally, in the governorate of Irbid, the Student Union of Yarmuk University staged a protest on 18 September 2012. This student union was founded in 1992 to ‘build the personality of the student [and make him] aware of the issues of his community (*umma*).\(^{1023}\) During this protest called for by the student union, only Islamic slogans were voiced.\(^{1024}\) In addition, it reportedly condemned the ‘offense’ by ‘a small group of people hating Islam and Muslims,’ and called for protests on a national and Arab level, as well as for the boycott of ‘American and Jewish products.’ With regards to Islam, the protests allegedly considered it ‘the religion of balance, moderation, and non-violence’ by underlined by the author (*dīn al-iʿtidāl wa al-wasaṭiyya wa nabdīh al-ʿunf*), and rejected the violation of religions and religious symbols in

\(^{1021}\) *Al-Ghad*. 15 September 2012.

\(^{1022}\) Facebook. Doi: https://www.facebook.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%86-205639022807884/timeline/ (retrieved May 21, 2016).


\(^{1024}\) *Al-Ghad*. 19 September 2012.

http://www.alghad.com/articles/607055-%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86-205639022807884/timeline/ (retrieved May 21, 2016).
their differences.’ In addition, the leader of the student union, Aḥmad al-Batṭāniyya, viewed the video and the cartoons only as expressing ‘deep hatred.’

Two protests took place in the governorate of Jirash. The first one was on Friday 14 September 2012, following the Friday prayer, when dozens participated in a sit-in and march that was organized by the Islamic Movement (the Muslim Brotherhood) and the Coalition of Jirash for Reform (ʿilāf jirash li l-iṣlāḥ). This movement is described as a youth movement by al-Dustūr. According to al-Dustūr the protestors chanted Islamic slogans (ibid). According to al-Ghad, however, the march also demanded the protection of freedom and expressed its rejection of restrictions to freedom of speech and the imprisonment of those people participating in sit-ins.

On 17 September 2012, following the evening prayer, the movement “al-ʿiyāṣira for Reform” (ḥirāk al-ʿiyāṣira li l-iṣlāḥ) staged a march in the locality of Sākib, in the governorate of Jirash. Roughly a few hundred people participated in this march that reportedly criticised both the video and the continued imprisonment of activists. In addition, it called on the Islamic world to take a united position and accused the video of aiming to create strife and divide the Islamic world from the rest of the world. The leader of this movement, Kamāl al-ʿiyāṣira reportedly stated that “The Innocence of Muslims” constituted an ‘offense against the Messenger and all of us.’

There is only one report on a protest in the governorate of ʿAjlūn, but it was joined by a broad range of political and social actors. This protest took place on 14 September 2012 in the locality of Kufranja, following the Friday prayer, when a march and a sit-in took place.

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1026 Al-Ghad. 15 September 2012. الحرجونون ينددون بالفيديو المسيء للرسول . Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607348-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A1-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%86 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
1027 The movement hirāk al-ʿiyāṣira li l-iṣlāḥ seems to be one of the movements that appeared during the Arab Spring in Jordan and have called for reform. In particular, the movement reported on pressures and threats exerted on it by ‘ignorant people’ and the security forces because of its activism for peaceful democratic change. In Ammon News. 12 August 2011. "حراك العياصرة" يؤكدون إقامة مسيرتهم. Doi: http://www.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=104407 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
protest was reportedly led by a member of the Islamic Action Front, Muhammad Farīhāt, and the Popular Movement for Kufranja for Reform and Change (ḥirāk kufranja al-sha‘ī li l-īslāḥ wa al-taghyīr), representatives of the Islamic movement and other popular movements also participated in this protest. The Movement for Kufranja for Reform and Change is a locally based movement comprising local politicians, national figures, and, probably, the tribes as well. Furthermore, the former MP ʿAḥmad ʿInāb, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Zaghūl, and Rāṭib al-ʿInānza delivered speeches at this march. All these speeches condemned “The Innocence of Muslims,” demanded a law criminalising such acts and called on Arab and Islamic governments to take measures against them. Moreover, the speeches criticised the current election law and stated that the reforms implemented so far by the Jordanian government were not enough; instead it demanded a thorough battle against corruption and those involved in corruption (ibid). In addition, the banners carried at this protest reportedly criticised the United States for allowing the showing of “The Innocence of Muslims.”

Finally, al-Ghad reported on a protest that took place following the Friday prayer on 14 September 2012, in al-Salṭ and al-Balqā’. Although these are two different cities, al-Ghad only reported that ‘dozens of members of the youth and popular movement’ staged a protest against the ‘offense to the Messenger of God, by the enemies of the Arab and Islamic communities.’

5.3.2.3 Central Governorates

In comparison to the northern governorates, there were far fewer protests against “The Innocence of Muslims” in the central governorates, i.e. Mādabā, al-Karak and Tafileh (al-Ṭafīla). Although these governorates are actually the main pillars of the Hashemite monarchy, the protests of 2011 started in these governorates. More specifically, the first protests started in southern East Bank locality Dhībān (ICG 2012, 9). These governorates have been heavily

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1032 Al-Ghad. 15 September 2012. ت شعبية تنتصر للرسول وتطالب بالاصلاح عجلون: فعاليا. Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607350-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%B7-%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
affected by the collapse of agriculture and the reduction of public spending (ibid) since most inhabitants of the governorates are employed in the public sector (ICG 2012, 11), in addition to not being on major trading routes.

Two protests took place in the Mādabā Governorate. The first one was held on 14 September 2012 following the Friday prayer, when ‘representatives of the Islamic movement, of the popular and youth movement in the governorate of Madaba and the district Dhibān’ protested against “The Innocence of Muslims.”1034 The protesters reportedly called for the prosecution of the video’s makers and for limits to be put on anyone ‘who offends the Messenger of God (PBUH).’

Al-Dustūr also reported on 18 September 2012, that a number of students from the schools of Mādabā had organized a march to protest against the video.1035 However, the protests seem to have turned violent.

As far as the governorate of al-Karak is concerned, two protests against the video were reported as taking place there. The first protests happened in the city of al-Karak on Friday 14 2012 and, again, there are two different reports of this event. While al-Dustūr asserted that the protest was targeting the video,1036 al-Ghad gave an account of a protest that was mainly directed against the government. Al-Ghad reported the protests as having taken place in both the city of al-Karak and in the district of al-Mazār al-Janūbī.1037 The rather long article suggests that the issue of the video was not the main focus, since the protests, which were organized by hundreds of citizens, activists from political parties, and professional associations, also saw a statement issued demanding complete reforms, the suppression of the previous electoral law, a boycott of the elections in the locality, and prosecution for corruption.

1034 Al-Ghad. 15 September 2012. Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607346-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9-%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%8B%D8%88%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D8%96 (retrieved May 21, 2016).
1035 Al-Dustour. 18 September 2012.
1036 Al-Dustour. 15 September 2012.
1037 Al-Ghad. 15 September 2012. Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607347-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%84-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD (retrieved May 21, 2016).
Similarly, on 15 September 2012, al-Ghad reported on a protest that took place the day before in the district of Faqūʿ, in al-Karak Governorate.1038 These protests comprised ‘dozens of citizens and activists from the political parties, the professional associations, and the general population.’ Besides condemning the video “The Innocence of Muslims,” these protests seemed mostly aimed to condemn the government in the first place. The protests reportedly demanded reforms, rejecting the latest measures undertaken by the government, and sought the withdrawal of the government. Interestingly, the article used a sentence that was also used in the article mentioned above on the protest in al-Karak and al-Mazār al-Janūbī: ‘and the statement issued by the movement insisted on its rejection of what has happened lately on the national level regarding the increase in repression, intellectual, political, and media terror,’1039 which suggests a certain escalation.

With regards to the central governorate of Tafileh (al-Ṭafīla), one protest took place on Friday 14 September 2012 and both the reports of al-Dustūr and al-Ghad suggest that the protest was only directed against “The Innocence of Muslims.” According to al-Dustūr, the protest was organized by ‘the popular movement (ḥirāk) in the Tafileh governorate’ and the Islamic Action Front also participated.1040 During the protest, American and Israeli flags were burnt and Islamic slogans were chanted1041 (ibid). In addition, al-Dustūr wrote that the participants of the protest demanded a boycott of ‘American and Jewish products’ and considered the video a ‘dreadful crime against the truth of humanity’ (ibid). Furthermore, they described Muhammad and Islam as ‘the Lord of all humanity, insisting on Islam being a religion of balance, moderation, and non-violence [underlined by the author] (dīn al-iʿtidāl wa al-wasatiyya wa nabelh al-ʿunf)’ (ibid). This definition was also used by the students of Yarmuk University in Irbid. In addition, according to al-Ghad, the protesters expressed the idea that this video was not a first offense and that it only displayed ‘the deep hatred of the West and of its stepchild Israel.’1042

1038 Al-Ghad. 16 September 2012. Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607287-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD (retrieved May 21, 2016).

1039 Al-Ghad. 16 September 2012.


1041 معهذا فداك يا رسول الله.

1042 Al-Ghad. 15 September 2012. Doi. http://www.alghad.com/articles/607352-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%AC%D8%B3%D8%AF-
5.3.2.4 The South: Maʿān

Finally, with regards to the southern part of the country, there were two protests in the city of Maʿān. The first protest took place on September 14 September 2012, when hundreds of activists joined a protest and expressed various demands.\(^{1043}\) They appear to have condemned the ‘assault on the symbol of the Islamic community (umma) represented by the person of the noble Messenger who came with a message of mercy, justice, and of equality between all religions and races.’ In addition, they demanded the creation of a commission to punish the ‘thought war’ being waged on Islam.

The second protest took place on 19 September 2012, and was organized by the Salafi-jihadi stream. Roughly a few hundred people participated in this protest, among them popular and youth activists.\(^{1044}\) However, although the protest was staged by the Salafi-jihadi stream, its tone did not vary from that of other protests. It demanded the closure of the US embassy and the expulsion of the US ambassador, as well as the boycott of ‘American and Jewish products.’ In addition, the gathering viewed the video as part of a long series of ‘attacks’ on Islam and Muslims,’ affecting ‘principles and ethics,’ causing ‘strife’ and supported by the West. It called on Muslims to react using all means.

**Summary of Section 5.3.2**

These protests were interesting for several reasons. Firstly, there were no reports of protests in Zarqa, a city with a strong Islamist presence. Instead the Salafi(-Jihadi) protests took place in Amman and in Maʿān, another traditional hotbed of Islamism. The protests mainly took place in the northern governorates. Many protests did not have any leadership while the other protests were dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and reform movements that appeared in

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\(^{1043}\) Al-Ghad. 15 September 2012. معان: دعوة لحملة لمقاطعة البضائع والمنتجات الأميركية. Doi: http://www.alghad.com/articles/607351-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%89%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89%D8%A8%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9?q=3ac7a8a367d7651c818f724336e38&search=%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%85%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9%20%D9%85%20%D8%B3%20%D9%8A%20%D8%A8 (retrieved May 21, 2016).

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2011. This shows that protests against the regime continued well into 2012. In this regard, while
the pro-government newspaper al-Dustūr insisted on the protests being directed against the
video, al-Ghad painted another picture, one of protests condemning both the video and the
government. This also shows the active participation by the Muslim Brotherhood in protest
movements. Moreover, not a single protest invoked the Christians either as participants or in
the speeches.

Conclusion to Chapter 5

A broad range of actors and institutions in Jordan made some reaction to “The Innocence
of Muslims.” All of the official state institutions, the churches, the political parties, the
professional associations, as well as Christian, Muslims and/or local actors felt compelled to
react to this video. Interestingly, the political parties (the IAF), the professional associations
and the actors from local civil societies displayed a high level of mobilisation against “The
Innocence of Muslims” which also provided an occasion to protest against the government’s
policies. Surprisingly, the Salafi(-Jihadi) actors who staged protests in Amman and the South
officially appeared to be moderate.

Overall, the video was seen as an “offense” against Islam, Muhammad, and in some
cases, Muslims. No actor explicitly stated that he had seen the video. Similarly, the video was
accused in many instances of igniting “strife” and in some cases of igniting sectarian strife, as
well as promoting destabilization, division, and violence. Interestingly, the majority of the
reactions remained very vague concerning the background of “The Innocence of Muslims.” In
no instance was Coptic involvement discussed. In some rare cases, however, a Zionist
background was ascribed (Orthodox Society, the professional association of the imams, some
local protests) or reference was made to the alleged plan of the Americans and the Jews (Council
of Churches). Interestingly, these few mentions suggest a level of confusion between Zionism
and the Jews because some protests demanded a boycott of “Jewish products.”

In reaction to the video, many actors demanded a prosecution of the video’s producers
and an international law prohibiting such offenses against religions. The counter-arguments
formulated against the video were very telling. Firstly, many actors and institutions framed their
reaction as a defence of Islam. In this regard, on many levels, the reactions showed a high
feeling of responsibility for “defending Islam” and promoting a positive and tolerant image of
it. The official reactions of the state displayed a structured discourse on Islam that promoted
slogans such as “moderation,” “tolerance,” and “balance.” This discourse was also promoted
by a number of political actors. Yet key civil society actors, such as the professional
associations, did not make use of this wording. Secondly, the Christian actors, both clerics and lay people, responded by establishing Jordan as a model of Christian-Muslim relationships. In contrast, all the other actors insisted on this model but not in the general framework of the message conveyed by Islam and not in the specific Jordanian context. Thirdly, the two Protestant reactions (Council of Evangelical Churches and JETS) provided the only two instances where Christian reactions could be understood as a strategy of dissociation from the video.

The specificity of this chapter was the absence of joint Christian-Muslim reactions. This absence can be explained by the fact that the video was not connected to any Christian background in Jordan or that the reactions and protests did not need Christian visibility and participation to back their claims of a tolerant Islam. Mention of Christians in the reactions were very rare and if it happened, the allusion was very vague and often limited to the insistence on Islam’s recognition of all “revealed messages.” Only one reaction, by a professional association, rejected the generalisation of Christians.

In contrast, the attitude of the Christians in Jordan was very interesting. A broad range of actors did react and in their reactions they insisted on their Arab identity. Similarly, the statement by the Council of Churches presented the sole significant recognition of Muhammad as a religious leader for Christians. Thus, Christian-Muslim coexistence in Jordan was mostly dwelt on by these Christian actors. Many insisted on the brotherhood uniting Christians and Muslims as well as on their shared Arab identity, the same (religious) values, and equality. More importantly, these actors developed a theory of the “Jordanian model,” which rested on a “virtuous triangle” of close links between Arab Christians, Muslims, and the Hashemite monarchy. Thus, Christian reactions seemed to have been motivated by a genuine display of solidarity as part of social practices in a multi-religious society.

Finally, the issue of “the Jews” in this chapter was very interesting. On the one hand, in some cases the confusion between the Jews and Zionism provided the actors with a clear background for a denunciation. On the other hand, however, the Jews as part of the “revealed messages” served to back Islam’s claim as a tolerant religion to counter “The Innocence of Muslims.”
Conclusion: The Crisis of “The Innocence of Muslims”

In September 2012, “The Innocence of Muslims” created an uproar over a thirteen-minute poor quality video that needed synchronisation into Arabic, promotion by a Coptic extremist, Mūrīs Ṣādiq, media coverage in Egypt to attract attention, and finally resulted in condemnation and protests. Although this video denounced a specific situation in Egypt (i.e. the persecution of Copts), the uproar it provoked was not confined to Egypt but also spread throughout the wider region. It became evident that the “crisis” of “The Innocence of Muslims” was a manufactured crisis and was being used politically by (certain) key actors.

At the same time, this video could have had very dangerous consequences for Christians in the region, especially for Egyptian Christians. These consequences could have resulted from the very negative description of Muhammad in the video, the involvement of Copts in the United States in the production of the video, the media coverage in Egypt which connected this dubious video to “Copts” in general (both “in the diaspora” and in Egypt), or the failure of the Egyptian state in providing protection for the US embassy in Cairo. Indeed, violence did take place in two of the countries analysed in this Ph.D. thesis, as there was a violent protest in Tripoli, Lebanon.

Thus, there were several reasons for investigating the question of how and to what extent the issue of Christian-Muslim relations was raised in the reactions to this video. Firstly, the video denounced the state of these very relations in contemporary Egypt. Secondly, this denunciation was framed in the context of a Coptic experience of Islam and expressed through the clichés of Christian apologetics as reformulated by the Coptic priest Zakaryā Buṭrus. Thirdly, many reactions in the Arab world accused the video of actually igniting a conflict between Arab Christians and Muslims (see further below).

As a result, “The Innocence of Muslims” offered an opportunity to analyse the dimension of Christian-Muslim relations through a snapshot taken in a time of acute crisis, and provided examples of the articulation of Christian-Muslim relations at a real and discursive level. Yet overall, the reactions in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories only dealt with this dimension to varying degrees. The issue was clearly raised in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and the West Bank. Yet in Jordan the issue was actually only raised by Christian actors, whereas in Israel the video was not framed in religious terms at all, but instead in a national, Palestinian terms. Similarly, the issue of Christian-Muslim relations was raised in Egypt to dissociate Christians in Egypt from this video.
“The Innocence of Muslims:” A Collective Condemnation

The reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” displayed a genuine rejection of such actions as were considered offenses, some elaborate reflections, and also some surprising interpretations and conspiracy theories, given that it was a video few actors had actually watched. In most cases the video was rejected as an “offense” against Islam, the prophet Muhammad, all Muslims, “muqaddāsāt” and, in some cases, human rights. The word “muqaddāsāt” recurred in all four chapters covering the reactions (Chapter 2, 3, 4, 5) and was translated differently according to the context. While in Chapter 4 it could clearly be understood as meaning “sacred places,” in the other chapters, the same word was instead translated as “sacred things/items.” Interestingly, in some reactions, the video was considered an attack on the freedom of religion, since respect for religion was equated with respect for the human and his dignity. Therefore, “freedom of creed” was seen as a basic and fundamental human right that is as important as freedom of speech.

In general, the reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” reflected the specific context in which these reactions were formulated. In Jerusalem and the West Bank the video was eventually connected to the issue of “price-tag” and the Israeli occupation (Chapter 4). In Egypt, in some cases, the video was interpreted in the context of the country having recently chosen an “Islamic path.” Therefore, the video was also understood as a proof of the West fearing the spread of Islam or of Western uneasiness with Islam and religion in general (shaykh al-Azhar Ahmad al-Ṭayyib). Similarly, in Gaza, the video was mostly seen as yet another attack by the West on Islam. Thus, many reactions reflected an essentialising approach to “the West” reportedly brought about by certain interest groups. In addition, the West was strongly accused of practicing double standards by allegedly allowing the “offense” of religions while prohibiting the denial of the Holocaust. In all the countries assessed, the counter-reactions to the video called for an international law prohibiting such “offenses” and prosecution of the video’s producers. Many reactions also focused on promoting another, more positive and tolerant image of Islam (an approach taken especially in Jordan and by the muftī of Egypt). Many actors in Egypt tried to pressure President Mursī into suspending diplomatic relations with the United States. Thus apart from a small number of exceptions, most reactions showed a misunderstanding of the practice of freedom of expression in “the West” where governments have no say in such matters.

Interestingly, while the reactions were very elaborate in their criticism, they did not discuss the content of the video at all, a phenomenon observed especially with regard to the first part (i.e. the persecution of the Copts). Of all the reactions, only three actors actually stated
that they had seen the video (Bishop George Khuḍr, Lebanon; al-daʿwa al-salafiyya, and the Coptic organization, iʿtilāf aqbāṭ miṣr, Egypt) and did discuss its content. Moreover, the video was very rarely mentioned by its title, but instead was usually referred to as “the offending film” or simply “the offense” (isāʾa). This shows a high level of denial and an avoidance of sensitive matters at all costs. Yet the reactions were much more vocal in ascribing a specific aim to the video. This means that the reactions did not discuss the potentially dangerous consequences of the video, but rather its supposed goal. Most reactions pointed out that the video aimed to produce “strife,” be it between Christians and Muslims, in the region itself, or just strife in general. In Lebanon in particular, the assumption initially put forward by Hezbollah leader Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh that the video sought to divide Christians and Muslims in the Arab world was widely echoed. Similarly, many reactions in Lebanon pointed to an alleged plan by the West to divide the region along sectarian and religious lines, of which “The Innocence of Muslims” was reportedly yet another proof. These views were often connected to the idea of an “American-Jewish/Zionist” conspiracy (see below). Some reactions also raised the idea of a clash of civilizations which “the West” was promoting through this video. Alternatively, some Christian reactions considered the video to be directly targeting Christians in the region. In particular, former second Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament Īlī Firzlī drew on the idea of a conspiracy aimed at emptying the Middle East of its Christian inhabitants.

**Discussing the Background of the Video: The Issue of Zionism**

This daring title will eventually lead to an analysis of the very implicit and disguised way in which the subject of “the Jews/Zionism” was dealt with in the context of the video. Reactions in all five countries suggested that the issue of the video’s background was dealt with differently in each location. In Egypt, the reactions showed a progression from initially discussing the involvement of “a number of Copts” towards mentioning only a vague background, which was sometimes linked to (the idea of) an American and Zionist conspiracy. A Muslim representative of the Christian-Muslim institution bayt al-ʿāʾila even quoted *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to back his claims of a conspiracy (sic!). However, this progression can also be understood as an attempt to divert attention and anger away from the Copts in Egypt towards a vague, unknown background or a far-away and even vaguer enemy, i.e. Zionism. In Lebanon, many actors were well aware of the Coptic background, yet systematically framed their criticism in the context of a fight against Zionism. Importantly, this idea was put forward equally by Christian and Muslim actors, both clerics and lay people, and on a national and local level. This idea was systematically and obsessively uttered from the
beginning of the crisis in Lebanon. Yet the discussion of this alleged background also reflected a confusion between “the Jews,” Zionism, and Israel, and in one instance, an imam even referred to the Jews in the Quran to back his claim. In Israel and the Palestinian Territories, the Coptic involvement was little discussed and the video was eventually connected to the usual bogeymen; Israeli occupation, Zionism, and Western imperialism. It was only in the context of the West Bank that one reaction mentioned Christian-Muslim-Jewish coexistence. In contrast, in Jordan, most reactions only discussed the background of the video very vaguely but a few reactions did connect the video to a Zionist conspiracy. Here again, there was confusion between Zionism and “Jewish products,” of which a boycott was called. Yet the Jordanian case also presented another aspect of this issue: Since many reactions countered the video by emphasising the tolerant and peaceful message of Islam, they were actually referring to Judaism as a “revealed message” recognized by Islam to back their claim. Yet when asserting a Zionist background, few reactions actually used the information initially conveyed in Western media about an American-Israeli named “Sam Bacile.”

These different references to and confusion of Zionism, Israel, the Quranic Jews, and Judaism showed that these claims were not only driven by actual convictions and ideologies but were also used as a means to prevent backlashes against Christians in Egypt and to create unity in Lebanon through appealing to the idea of a society of resistance against Israel. Similarly, in the Palestinian contexts these references were means of creating unity and reactivating the Palestinian struggle. In all of the three cases which mentioned Zionism or the Israeli occupation, this affirmation was used in order to create an “other” and consequently to create a unity, a “we” that includes Arab Christians. The Jordanian case demonstrated another use for this “other,” one who serves to assert one’s own position (i.e. Islam as a tolerant religion).

“The Innocence of Muslims:” Pursuing Personal Interests

This paragraph aims to discuss two closely related issues: the political benefits many actors were able to draw from this video and the attitudes of Islamic actors towards Christians.

In general, the reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” were not only an authentic outcry of offended religious feelings but also represented an opportunity to further the credentials of the person reacting and to put pressure on opponents. In addition, the ability to mobilise against the video was used as a show of power. In Egypt, all of the official Islamic institutions as well as the Islamist and Salafi political parties and organizations were very vocal in their criticism of “The Innocence of Muslims.” Yet the official Islamic institutions did not
try to mobilise via protests. The (Muslim-only) protests either had no leadership or were dominated by alternative forces to the Muslim Brotherhood. In contrast, the latter dominated in joint Christian-Muslim protests and conferences. Similarly, al-gamāʿa al-islāmiyya, for instance, tried to mobilise for such joint protests but failed to attract any high-ranking Christian actors. Thus “The Innocence of Muslims” was an opportunity to make an appearance as a moderate and serious political contender. Many Islamist political actors adapted their discourse when needed. In contrast, President Mursī was seen as too passive and was actively pressured by his political contenders (especially by the Nur Party). In Lebanon, although a broad range of (Islamic) actors reacted to the video, there was a sharp discrepancy between Shia and Sunni levels of mobilisation. For Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, “The Innocence of Muslims” offered an opportunity to act as a national, inclusive actor and display a high capacity to mobilise their own followers, as well as high-ranking Christian and Sunni actors. It was also an opportunity for both parties to pressure the rivals of the March 14 Alliance. In contrast, the leaders of the Sunni community (the muftī, the Future Movement) did not try to mobilise at all and the gap was filled by marginal, unofficial elements such as the Salafi preacher Aḥmad al-Asīr, who actively sought to compete with Hezbollah. A similar competition for the lead was visible in Gaza where Hamas competed with other Islamist organizations. In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority proved particularly adept at mobilising against the video. In Jordan, a broad range of actors not only reacted but also displayed a high level of responsibility in the defence of Islam. In Jordan, protesting against the video was also seen as an opportunity to protest against the government. All in all, apart from in the West Bank, no official Islamic institution tried to mobilise against “The Innocence of Muslims.”

The attitudes of Islamic actors towards Christians reflected those actors’ different needs and motivations. First of all, one of the most surprising outcomes of this Ph.D. thesis is the remarkably moderate and pragmatic attitude displayed by various Islamist and Salafi actors in Egypt who consistently tried to prevent backlashes against Christians. This was not only motivated by the new context of political competition (and the need to appear as a moderate, serious and inclusive actor) but also by a real concern, as the attitude of al-daʿwa al-salafiyya suggested. This fear of backlashes was also evident in the attitudes of Hamas and some actors in Lebanon. In addition, the attitude of Islamic actors displayed expectations towards Christians to react, to condemn the video and show solidarity and loyalty. This was evident in the views expressed by some preachers in Egypt, the media, as well as in Hezbollah leader Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh’s speech in which he included Christians in the struggle against Zionism. To some extent the Islamic actors needed Christian participation in their protests and a certain level of Christian
visibility, not only to legitimise the protests against the video but also to appear effectively as a moderate and inclusive actor. In contrast, in Jordan there was no need for Christian participation and visibility; the Jordanian case did not show specific attitudes towards Christians. Furthermore, many Islamic reactions simply thanked the Christians for their condemnation of the video.

“The Innocence of Muslims:” The Question of Christian-Muslim Relations

This question will be analysed on three levels; firstly, joint Christian-Muslim reactions; secondly, discussions about Christian-Muslim relations; and thirdly, the extent of mutual assimilation.

The many joint Christian-Muslim reactions represented a key aspect of the reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims.” These reactions varied greatly from one to country to another. In Jordan and in Gaza there were no reactions of the kind at all. This can be explained by the fact that the reactions either did not connect the video to the local Christians or else felt no need for a Christian participation. In general, the reactions resulted from the social practice in a multi-religious society of showing solidarity and from a need for a Christian visibility, as mentioned above. In Egypt, the churches and several Christian actors initiated a number of conferences and protests. In Lebanon, a broad range of Christian-Muslim reactions took place which displayed various modes of religious accommodation. The participation of high-ranking Christian actors in the Hezbollah/Amal protests was merely symbolic, whereas local initiatives, especially in southern and northern Lebanon demonstrated a high level of equality (and no explicit expectation towards Christians to show solidarity). The spiritual summit that brought all the religious representatives of Lebanon together witnessed significant efforts at mutual understanding and rapprochement.

In addition, the reactions to the video also displayed some reflections on Christian-Muslim coexistence. The case of Egypt exhibited a structured discourse of national unity using slogans, such as *abnāʾ al-waṭan al-wāḥid, yad wāḥida* and especially *al-waṭan al-wāḥid*. Yet these slogans were used reflexively and the actors did not dwell on what this unity consisted of. Instead, the discourse of national unity was pervasive; it was an approach, a means to prevent backlashes against Christians, and, most of all, a means of denial by omission used by both Christians and Muslim actors. Muslim actors used this discourse while systematically distinguishing between Copts and Muslims and insisting on the brotherhood between the “two elements of the united nation,” while church leaders elaborated a little more on this unity. For some bishops, this unity rested on shared values, the same history, the same monotheism, and
close biological unity (the same “woven fabric”). Yet it seemed that it was precisely within this context of a structured and pervasive discourse of national unity that peaceful coexistence and equality was made possible and conceivable for Islamist and Salafi actors in Egypt.

In contrast, in Lebanon, Christian-Muslim coexistence was seen as part of a struggle against Israel. There were a few reflections on this unity; for Bishop George Khuḍr, Christians and Muslims constituted the umma of God. Other (Christian) actors insisted on shared monotheistic values. The Palestinian cases were very interesting, as the video afforded an opportunity to define Palestine as a model of Christian-Muslim relations. Historic and religious events were used to back these claims. This unity was also explained by the same plight and the ongoing Israeli occupation, a shared Arab Palestinian identity and a deep solidarity and mutual respect. However, the fact that lay actors dominated the reactions in Israel, vividly displayed the absence of a sectarian approach that distinguished between Christians and Muslims. As explained in Chapter 4, the sectarian approach was rejected in the Palestinian context. For instance, Bishop ʿAṭāʾ Allāh Ḥannā rejected the very idea of distinction between Christian and Muslims martyrs. Yet many Palestinian reactions referred to this exact distinction. In contrast, leftist Arab-Israeli lay actors did not use religious or sectarian wording at all but simply established a national Arab Palestinian framework.

In Jordan, the reflections on Christian-Muslim relations were solely undertaken by Christian actors. Interestingly, both clerics and lay actors established Jordan as a model of coexistence and defined a “virtuous triangle” between Christians, Muslims and the Hashemite monarchy. These actors insisted in particular on their shared Arab identity, the same religious values and a history of equality.

As a result, these different reflections displayed how religious diversity is felt and expressed.

Finally, an important aspect was the extent of religious assimilation or absence of it. For instance, in all contexts, a number of Christian reactions – interestingly mostly cleric reactions –, made use of Islamic wording. Jesus Christ was defined as a messenger and prophet and his specific Christian meaning was silenced. Similarly, the Gospel was defined as a revealed message like the Quran, which it is not quite correct. In particular, in the Egyptian context, this practice can be understood as an attempt to delegitimize any offenses against Christian religious symbols. In addition, Muhammad was mostly mentioned as the prophet or messenger of Islam. Yet in a very few cases in Lebanon, Muhammad was mentioned as the “Arab messenger” and “Arab prophet.” In a more explicit manner, the council of Churches in Jordan acknowledged that Muhammad was even relevant
for Christians. On the other hand, Muslim actors mostly referred to Jesus as the Islamic prophet ʿĪsā. Yet the reference to Jesus Christ was also an attempt to appear an inclusive and moderate actor. For instance, Hasan Naṣr Allāh spoke of ʿĪsā al-Masīḥ, and a leader of the Nur Party, Nādir Bakkār alluded to al-sayyid al-Masīḥ. Islam does recognize Jesus Christ as the anointed (al-Masīḥ), yet most Muslim actors state that Islam recognizes Jesus Christ as a prophet in order to underline Islam’s tolerance. Thus, referring to Jesus as al-Masīḥ displays even more of an effort at religious accommodation since in, this instance, Nādir Bakkār stated that an offense against Jesus Christ was also an offense against Muhammad. Most actors also referred to Christians as masīḥiyūn or aqbāṭ. Only in very few instances, mostly in Egypt, did Islamist actors also refer to Egyptian Christians as naṣārā. There are two similar cases in Lebanon, yet in one of them, Māhir Ḥammūd was well aware of the fact that this word is a Quranic word and no longer used. The use of naṣārā instead of masīḥiyūn or aqbāṭ is very telling because it rejects the self-appellation the Christians currently use and is felt to be offensive by many Christians (Khoury 25 March 2015). Interestingly, in Egypt, Christian diversity tended to be reduced to one Egyptian church, which was mostly nationalised as the “Egyptian church” (muftī). Finally, an interesting case was Palestine where, in one instance, a kind of religious pantheon was established with Muhammad as the “prophet of mercy” and Jesus Christ as the “prophet of love.”

**Christian Reactions: Identity, Belonging, Loyalty**

In Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories, a broad range of Christian actors all reacted. Apart from the churches, a number of Christian institutions, organizations, politicians, and key actors also reacted. The content of the reactions varied in some cases and sometimes there was also a discrepancy between clerical and lay reactions. Yet all “Christian” reactions condemned “The Innocence of Muslims.”

There were many factors motivating these reactions. First of all, in the Arab world there is a general rejection of any art production or action that reportedly offends religion. As was mentioned, *The Da Vinci Code* was forbidden in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Similarly, there was a controversy surrounding the novel *Azazeel* by Egyptian author Yusif Zaydān. The condemnations were also understood as a necessary display of solidarity in these multi-religious societies. Yet some reactions illustrated the uneven relevance of this issue for the various Christian actors. In some cases, the condemnation was merely symbolic, while in other cases there was a real degree of reflection and sincerity behind the positions. Most importantly, a key drive behind many Christian reactions was the fear of backlashes, especially in Egypt.
reactions, this fear was not openly expressed, but was evident in the number of reactions and the diversity of actors who reacted. Similarly, this factor also seems to have been of significance in other countries, since the Latin bishop of Amman, Mārūn Laḥḥām, and the former general secretary of the Council of Churches in Jordan, Father Ḥannā Kildānī, alluded to the potentially violent reactions by Muslims as being a motivation behind their reactions in interviews later on with the author.

Two further key aspects of the Christian reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” were the questions of whether strategies were used to dissociate Christians from this video and thus prevent backlashes, and whether the Christian actors and institutions offered criticisms.

Firstly, strategies used to dissociate Christians from this video were very evident in Egypt overall and also in the case of Protestant reactions in Egypt and Jordan. As was shown in Chapter 2, the Coptic Orthodox Church in particular and a number of Christian actors displayed a several strategies aiming to completely dissociate Christians from “The Innocence of Muslims.” Such strategies consisted of defining the church as the sole legitimate spokesman of Christians, taking a pro-active role in Christian-Muslim reactions, the way the background of the video was discussed and questioned, and the using of the discourse of national unity. Similarly, Protestant reactions in Egypt and Jordan made concerted efforts at dissociating local Protestant Christians from this video and at root them in these countries. To some extent, the repeated assertions by Christian Jordanian actors and institutions establishing Jordan as a model for Christian-Muslim relations can be interpreted as a strategy and as a reminder of the siding with the Muslims. In contrast, there were few efforts to dissociate Christians in Israel from the video and the Palestinian Territories, and fewer still in Lebanon. This suggests that there was no fear of backlashes, although such events had previously had an impact on local Christian symbols (see introduction; the so called Danish cartoons and the speech of Pope Benedict XVI in Regensburg).

Secondly, a key question was whether Christians formulated any criticism in response to “The Innocence of Muslims.” Interestingly, it was mostly in Lebanon that such criticism was formulated. In particular, the churches, the president and a number of organizations and parties all criticized the violent reactions to the film. Furthermore, political actors such as the Lebanese Forces or ḥizb al-katā‘ ib al-lubnāniyya criticised these violent reactions for actually tarnishing the image of Islam, and criticised Hezbollah for manufacturing this crisis. In Egypt, some actors also formulated criticism. Young Coptic organizations in particular denounced the double standards in Egyptian society. Yet, there were few criticisms of the violent reactions to the film and most of the criticisms that were made were implicit. For instance, the Coptic Catholic
Church criticised the role of the media in creating the crisis surrounding “The Innocence of Muslims.” All these criticisms, both implicit and explicit, are very symptomatic of the self-confidence Christian actors and institutions felt.

Finally, one of the main issues was the question of identity raised by this video. Interestingly, Christian actors in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Jordan very much insisted on their Arab identity, as did Greek Orthodox actors in Lebanon. In contrast, the designation mostly used in Egypt was “Copt” (by Coptic Orthodox Christians and church) and “Christian.” Overall, the Christian reactions to “The Innocence of Muslims” were evidence of a desire for equality, to remind the Muslims of their shared identity, values, and even their shared destiny, be it as part of the “united nation” or against “Zionism.” To some extent, “The Innocence of Muslims” was a very dangerous moment for the Christians, especially in Egypt, and yet it seemingly fostered Christian-Muslim relations and made for a better level of understanding, especially in Egypt.
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مفتي الجمهوريات للأزهر: نصرة النبي تتحقق باتباع منهجه والإسلام يرفض العنف والأرهابpons

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لا اعتضامات وماهمية مثيرة، في رحلة مضحكة في طريق أخرى. 

الجميل استنكر في مؤتمر صحافي الأساءة للفيلم، واتبعته الزيارة التاريخية. 

الحوت تمنى مناقشة الاستراتيجية الدفاعية، وروى عن زيارة البابا. 

تظاهرة حاشدة في صور، احتجاجاً على الفيلم المسيء. 

المجلس الشيعي ينوه بزيارة البابا، ويدعو الشعوب للحوار والتعايش.

المجلس المذهبي الدرزي ينادى المسلمين، بعد الاعتداء على القرية. 

تحت شعار مسلمون ومساعداً، تشن حملة لمنع الفيلم، ودفعها للحوار والتعايش. 

الأب جبرائيل نداف يعلن عن رفضه التام للفيلم، ويدعو للصمت والاعتراف.

الآب جبرائيل نداف يعلن عن رفضه التام للفيلم، ويدعو للصمت والاعتراف. 


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Chapter 1.1.1.1 The Reaction of Bishop Mūsā

Copts Today. 11 September 2012.


**بيان من نيابة الأنبا موسى ردًا على الفيلم المسيي للرسول**

تحت عنوان "ترفض الإساءة للأديان ورموزها". أصدر الأنبا "موسي" سلسلة من الرسائل باللغة العربية، حيث قالت: "لا يوجد أي تحرش برموز الدين أو الأديان في الأفلام." وظلت هذه الرسائل متاحة على الإنترنت حتى عام 2014.

فيما يتعلق بالفعل، فإن انتهاكات الدين الإسلامي والرسول في الأفلام الفيلم المثير للجدل "الصوفي للرسول" مرفوضة من المصلحة المسيحية، وتمكناًً تعلمنا الحفاظ على مشاعر أخواننا في الوطن. وقد شاهدنا بنفسى قداسة البابا، وهو يعنف أحد هؤلاء بشدة، قائلاً له: "أنتم تؤذون مصر، وكل الأقباط، بهذه التصرفات المشينة.

شكرًا لأحبائنا المسلمين، أنتم لا تأخذون "أقباط المهجر" الشرفاء، أكثر من مليون، بهذه القلة المنحرفة. وشكرًا لخروجهم مع أخواتهم المسيحيين في استهداف موحّد ضد هذا العمل...
Chapter 2.1.1.4 The Evangelical Synod of Cairo

مجمع القاهرة الاجنلي يدين الفيلم المسئ للإسلام
أدان مجمع القاهرة الانجليز، في بيان صادر عنه صباح اليوم، الفيلم المسئ للإسلام معلنا تبرأة من كل الأعمال التي تنطوي على أساءة مباشرة أو غير مباشرة للأديان.
وقال القس نادى لبيب، رئيس المجمع، في تصريحات له: "الإفلاضات المتقدون"، أن المجمع كلف القس "رفعت فكرى"، رئيس لجنة الإعلام والنشر بالسندس، للرد على المقال المسئ للسيميحة الذي كتبه الأساتذة محمد خزيمة رئيس تحرير جريدة "الأهرام المسئلي" تحت عنوان "الأخلاق المسئلي".
وقال فيه "الدولة الدينية التي زعمونها، إنما ظهرت في العصور 2012 سبتمبر 2012 وتخاريف الدولة الدينية"، بتاريخ الوسطي في أوروبا سيطرة الكنيسة وطيغي رجالها بدينها المحرف على الشعوب فظلموا العباد واستعبدوهم وقادموا المذاهب المخالفة، لذا عانت تلك المجتمعات في ذلك الحين أفظع ألوان العذاب، وهو ما انتهى بثورات الشعوب، وكان أبرزها الثورة الفرنسية.

Chapter 3.6.1 The Statement of the Spiritual Summit in Bkerké

بيان القمة الروحية بكركي
بدعوة من غبطة البطريرك الماروني مار بشاره بطرس الراعي، عقد أصحاب الغبطة والسماحة والسيادة رؤساء الطوائف اللبنانية المسيحية والإسلامية وممثلوهم فئة روحية في الصرح البطريركي في بكركي شارك فيها أصحاب السماحة مثني الجمهورية اللبنانية الشيخ محمود رشيد فلاني، نائب رئيس المجلس الأساسي الشيعي، المجمع الأساسي للإمام الشيخ عبد الأمير قبلان، وشيخ عقل طائفة الموحدين الدروز الشيخ نعيم حسن، رئيس المجلس الأساسي للطائفة الإنجيلية كاثوليكيا مار أنتي影业 كاثوليكية مار أنتي影业 كاثوليكية.
بوصف المستوى الثاني: القس الدكتور صبري صهيوني رئيس المجمع الإلحادي للطائفة الإنجيلية في لبنان، صاحب السماحة المطارنة الياس عودة متروبوليت بيروت للروم الأرثوذكس، بولس دحدح النائب الرسولي لللاتين، ميشال قصرجي النائب البطريركي للكلدان، جورج صليبة ممثل جاريك الوراثي، المجمع الأساسي للإمام الكاثوليكي نسيس بدرس الراحل نسيس بدرس، الرسولي الروم الأرثوذكس؛ صاحب السماحة مثالاً على الكنيسة، واليشوعي كاثوليكية مار أنتي影业 كاثوليكية.

تعود مجتمعين ثلاثة مواضيع: تمزج زيارة قداسة البابا بندكتوس السادس عشر إلى لبنان، ودعوته السعودية "براءة المسلمين"، والدعوة إلى مواجهة الأزمة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية في لبنان، وبعد النقاش اصدرت البيان التالي:

أولاً: أعزب وعلى نتائج الزيارة، وتوسط وتأكيد على هم واتباعهم الكبير للزيارة التاريخية التي قام بها قداسة البابا بندكتوس السادس عشر إلى لبنان، والآتى فيها، ونتائج الزيارة التي أعطت لها النتائج الإيجابية على جميع القضايا والأديان، ومكافحة الظلم في العالم العربي.

ثانياً: تضمنت هذه الزيارة كلمات قليط في المناسبة، وبخاصة لجهة التأكيد على إصلاح ومعالجة العلاقات التاريخية بين المسلمين والسيميحيين في الشرق الأوسط، وعلى أن لبنان نموذج السلام هذا العلاقات والتوازن السياسي - الاجتماعي على كل مستوى، وتعود مجتمعين ثلاثة مواضيع.

ثالثاً: تضمنت هذه الزيارة تأكيد على ربط لبنان في موقعه الشرقي كمبادرة تجيدة لمشكلة لبنان التي تهم أولئك الذين يدعونها إلى أبواب لبنان، وعلى أن لبنان نموذج السلام هذا العلاقات والتوازن السياسي - الاجتماعي على كل مستوى، وتعود مجتمعين ثلاثة مواضيع.

وحاور من أجل حضارة قائمة على السلام والتنوع في الوحدة، وليس ساحة صراع، ورغم وفاقنا اللبناني الداخلي والقلق.
من التطورات الجارية في المنطقة، لا يزال قداسة البابا يعتبر أن لبنان يحمل رسالة تاريخية وحضارية إلى العالم بأسره.
وت威名 أصحاب الغبطة والسماحة، ولا يزال قداسة البابا يعتبر أن لبنان يحمل رسالة تاريخية وحضارية إلى العالم بأسره.
وتوافق أصحاب الغبطة والسماحة أن لبنان يحمل رسالة توسطية في الحوار الدائم بين الحضارات والأديان لصالح البشرية جمعاء.
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وتوافق أصحاب الغبطة والسماح...
بيان شجب و إدانة

الجمعية الأرثوكسية في الأردن تدين وتشجب عرض الفيلم الذي يسيء للإسلام والإخوة المسلمين والذي يتناول على الممارسات الدينية والعقيدة الإسلامية وتؤكد بيان عرض هذا الفيلم في مثل هذه الأوقات التي تمر بها المملكة العربية وتن_TIM إلى زرع نزاعات بين أبناء الأمة العربية الواحدة ويجهز هذا الاعتداء على الإخوة المسلمين بعد فترة ليست بعيدة من اعتداءات صهيونية على نير الطموح في النفس مما يؤكد بأن هناك مخطط صهيوني يمهل للعرب مسيحيين ومسلمين.

ويدورنا نطالب المجتمع الدولي والحكومات العربية للضغط لإيقاف عرض هذا الفيلم المسيء لمشاعر المسلمين والمسيحيين وتؤكد بياننا أن هذا البلد الطيب أخره متحفرين بحمائم العيش المشترك، في ظل قيادة جلالة الملك عبد الله الثاني ابن الحسين المعظم.

Chapter 5.2.2 The Orthodox Society


Diese Arbeit hat in erster Linie aufgezeigt, dass das Video sowohl von christlichen als auch von muslimischen Akteuren als Verletzung religiöser Gefühle verurteilt wurde. Außerdem gab es keine bis kaum Repressalien gegen Christen in diesen Ländern. Vor allem islamistische und salafistische Akteure in Ägypten waren um eine Deeskalation bemüht und traten überraschend moderat gegenüber den Christen auf. Bis zu einem gewissen Grad wurde die Krise um „The Innocence of Muslims“ produziert, weil dadurch manche Akteure ihre Position stärken und ihre politischen Rivalen unter Druck setzen konnten, vor allem in Ägypten (Nur Partei) und im Libanon (die Hisbollah und die Amal Bewegung). In diesem Zusammenhang zeigte sich, dass es einen Bedarf nach der christlichen Beteiligung an und Sichtbarkeit bei den Protestingen gab, um letztere zu legitimieren, und dass Christen gewissermaßen ein Instrument des politischen Pragmatismus waren. Im Gegensatz dazu zeigten die christlichen Reaktionen den Willen zur Gleichheit.
Abstract in English

In September 2012, a video entitled “The Innocence of Muslims” provoked on YouTube an uproar in the Arab and Muslim worlds and clearly had the potential to damage already fragile interreligious relations, especially in Egypt. “The Innocence of Muslims” had been produced and promoted by extremist Copts living in the United States, extensively covered by Egyptian media and depicted the prophet Muhammad in a very negative way. In particular, the video showed how a group of Muslims attacked Copts while the police did not interfere. In a second part, the video explained the “cause” for this persecution through the character and life of Muhammad. Resorting to clichés of Christian apologetics in early Islam, Muhammad was depicted as a womanizer, child-molester and ruthless killer.

This Ph.D. thesis focuses on the question how and to what extent the question of Christian-Muslim relations was raised in the context of this video in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories. This focus allows to fill several gaps. Firstly, previous scholarly work on similar events – for instance the so called Danish cartoons (2006) – were limited to the coverage of Western media and did not investigate the content of the reactions. Secondly, since “The Innocence of Muslims” denounced the very state of (Arab) Christian-Muslim relations, this thesis is a snap-shot of these relations both on a real and discursive level. Thirdly, the video raised far reaching questions about the identity, the belonging and even the loyalty of Christians in the Arab world. Finally, it can be assumed that the Christian reactions to the video were not only motivated by the fear of backlashes.

This Ph.D. thesis investigated the Christian and Muslim reactions in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories, the joint Christian-Muslim reactions against the video (conferences, protests) as well as the content and background of the video. Overall, this thesis is “text-based,” meaning that all these reactions were analysed by means of a contextual analysis, and a philological and historical approach. The material comprised written and oral texts drawn from Arabic newspapers, ecclesiastical magazines, websites and videos. The thesis is largely based on a field research carried out between September 2014 and May 2015 in Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem and Jordan thanks to the Marietta Blau Grant.

The thesis had many outcomes. Firstly, it has shown that both Christian and Muslim actors strongly condemned this video for being an “offense.” In addition, there were limited, nay no, anti-Christian backlashes. Especially, Islamist and Salafi actors in Egypt displayed a strong effort to prevent backlashes against Christians and appeared surprisingly moderate. Yet, to some extent, the crisis of “The Innocence of Muslims” was manufactured by some actors to further their political credentials and pressure their contenders, especially in Egypt (Nur Party) and Lebanon (Hezbollah/Amal Movement). The findings suggested a need for the Christian participation and visibility in the protests, and the status of Christians as “political assets.” In contrast, the Christian reactions showed a desire for equality.