COVERAGE OF ISLAM IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EGYPTIAN MEDIA

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By

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The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to the many who supported me in this crazy process. First to my wife, Mimi, who listened to me talk incessantly about Islam and media in Egypt for more than a year. To Dr. Kimberly Meltzer, for her guidance as my advisor and her vast knowledge. To Dr. Adel Iskandar for his expertise. To Prof. Terry Mattingly, a longtime mentor. And to the many journalists who work hard to provide effective coverage of Islam in Egypt on a daily basis.
This study investigates how Islam is covered by English-language Egyptian media. In past research, Arab media scholars have noted that Arab media, examined as a whole, is problematic to draw any sort of conclusions from because of its complex nature. It is more effective to look at the environment with a more localized, specific approach. And English-language research on how Islam has been covered has been primarily been done in terms of how Western media covers Islam. Little or no English research exists which examines how Egyptian media professionals and bloggers cover Islam, the major religion of Egypt. In this study, data will be gathered to help fill in this important gap in research with a very specific medium, country and language in mind.

A news framing analysis will be performed on articles relating to Islam in English-language Egyptian news sources Al Ahram Weekly, Daily News Egypt and Al-Masry Al-Youm to determine how discussions of Islam are framed in coverage. Interviews will be also be performed with journalists who work in Egyptian English news media to discern the motivations and influences that affect coverage of Islam.
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INTRODUCTION

A journalist in Egypt had a great story on her hands—one that promised to grab the attention of her readers. The story covered the recent release of a documentary on the coexistence of Islam and homosexuality. Egyptian homosexuals were willing to go on the record about the difficulty of expressing their sexuality in a majority-Muslim society, which religiously denounces homosexuality. But the difficulty of the story was in the journalist’s ability to maintain her status as a “professional” journalist. Simply by publishing the views of homosexuals, she was guaranteeing herself hate mail or worse—since in Egyptian society reporting the views of others is often construed as espousing the views of others. Yet she wanted to be fair to different viewpoints. Her difficulty came in finding a religious scholar, or imam who could respond to the documentary without resorting to “they’re going to hell.” When she finally finished the piece, it went through a great deal more editing than the typical piece—edited word-by-word (Interview 8).

Such situations are not uncommon in Egyptian societies. Journalists strive for professionalism but face numerous obstacles in maintaining balance and fairness. These challenges are rooted culturally, politically and religiously. But in Egyptian society those challenges can appear uniform because religion is politics, and religion is culture.

Another journalist wanted to write an article about why more Muslims don’t attend Christian churches. There’s no Quranic law that prevents Muslims from doing so and in fact, the journalist thought it would be helpful for interfaith dialogue between Coptic Christians—native Egyptian Christians—and Muslims. But in preparing her piece
she fell under scrutiny of her editor and, when published, the piece received a great deal of both internet and postal backlash (Interview 1).

In one case, an Egyptian journalist attended a speech in which the speaker argued that religion could only harm the Egyptian people. The speaker was so nervous about the impact his statements could have that he went to the journalist after the speech and asked him to keep his comments from the paper. The journalist obliged (Interview 4).

And he obliged for understandable reasons (Doha Debates, 2006). In contemporary Egyptian society, journalists can be fired, have their printer seized, can cause a riot or can find themselves tortured in an Egyptian prison for the wrong kind of coverage. What is the wrong kind of coverage? If it causes a ruckus, and certainly if it causes a riot, it’s the wrong kind of coverage. Issues of Islam are sensitive and yet at the heart of Egyptian society. Islam influences fashion, food, lifestyle and politics. The *hijab* and veil are becoming more common in Egyptian society. Some would point to the rising power of the Muslim Brotherhood—a conservative political Islam sect in Egypt. Certainly religion plays a role in the increasing importance of the female coverings, but they’re also fashionable. Similarly, political rhetoric often draws on Islam in order to achieve popular appeal.

So a project that poses the question “how is Islam covered in Egypt?” is challenging. Islam is everywhere. There’s no need for an “Islam” beat in Egypt, because stories that relate to Islam appear in stories about politics, business and fashion.

Past scholarship has well established that Islam is not covered effectively in the West. Muslims receive overwhelming negative coverage in the United States, Great
Britain and even in Australia. Western journalists struggle to cover religion as a whole, but Islam in particular (Marshall, Gilbert et al., 2008). And yet there has never been a study that tries to understand how Islam is covered in a Muslim majority context. It is useful for the journalist as much as the academic to understand the nature of coverage of Islam in Egypt.

Egyptian society differs significantly from the West. As earlier noted, Islam is a part of daily life in Egypt. A non-Muslim journalist noted that she was essentially a Muslim “simply by virtue of living in Egypt” (Interview 3). In the West, Islam is an expanding but minority religion. Yet some similarities exist between Egypt and the West. Egyptian journalists strive to tell accurate, fair stories about events that matter to the people of their country. And the Egyptian constitution guarantees freedom of the press.

Of course, freedom of the press means little if the police won’t stop a riot (Mattingly, 2006). And there lies the contradictions that make up Egyptian society. This thesis project aims to examine those contradictions and attempts to provide a resource for academics and professionals who seek to understand the same question: how is Islam covered in Egypt’s Muslim-majority context?

This study is a first step into that untouched field. This study will focus on coverage of Islam in English-language Egyptian press. The study includes a quantitative content analysis which looks at coverage of Islam from October 31, 2009 to February 1, 2010 in Daily News Egypt, Al-Masry Al-Youm and Al Ahram Weekly. The study will also include interviews from eight key journalists at English-language publications in Egypt. Those interviews provide a window into the world of press coverage of Islam in Egypt.
This thesis project will be split into three chapters. The first chapter will survey existing literature on the subject of Arab media, of Islam in Egypt and of coverage of Islam. The subject of Arab media is a burgeoning one in academia. Often a writer will start by saying that the Arab media is multifaceted and that there is no way to generalize about the state of media in the Arab world—and then go on to generalize about the Arab media (Rugh, 2004; Mellor, 2008). The study aims to be narrow and deep. It is aimed at a specific medium in a specific country and aims to understand it. And the study of the press in Egypt intertwines closely with the history of Islam in Egypt. The press was initially introduced to Egypt as a tool of the Islamic Modernist movement, which sought to bring Western institutions—the academy, the newsroom, the laboratory—into an Islamic context (Voll, 2009). And Egypt has a rich history of Islamic thinkers and reformers. But the only English-language studies on the coverage of Islam in Egypt focus on fundamentalist literature (Abedelnasser, 2000).

The second chapter will discuss the methods used for this study and explain the rationale for the methods. A content analysis is optimal for this study because it looks at the product created by journalists. The three publications examined represent a state-run press that operates in Arabic and English, an English-only independent press, and an independent press that shares content between the English and Arabic edition. The interviews will provide insights into the inner workings of the newsrooms—the context and motivations that go into the coverage examined.

The third chapter will discuss the findings of the study. The findings of this study are largely what a casual observer would expect. Islam is covered with great sensitivity
on the part of the journalists. Content analysis affirmed that issues related to Islam are not avoided and journalists said they were comfortable covering issues related to Islam—how could they not be when relatively every issue relates to Islam? Also, English-language journalists feel they have some leeway in reporting on Islam. This study can’t make any claims on how Arabic-language publications cover Islam, as none were sourced. But it is interesting the journalists often asserted the freedom they had at their organization by noting that they had more freedom than if they were at an Arabic-language publication. And so perhaps more reporting, at least more balanced reporting can occur at an English-language publication. And journalists at those publications are also keenly aware of concerns over terrorism and fundamentalism in the Islamic context. This may reflect the predispositions of the English-language audience—primarily Egyptian elites and Westerners—but it also may represent a shared concern. And journalistic concerns are often rooted in societal problems. Many journalists felt that religious minorities could be better covered in Egyptian publications, but several also noted that their audience might not care if they’re covered. As one journalist noted, “The problem we face in Egypt is that we don’t care about minorities” (Interview 8). Finally, there are also substantial differences between coverage in the state-run press and the independent press.

Islam isn’t covered in a vacuum. There’s more to coverage of Islam than what’s said in a mosque, by a religious scholar or by an imam. News coverage of Islam in Egyptian English-language focuses on how the faith operates in the lives of everyday Egyptians—how Islam appears in the culture and politics of the country.
The hypothesis of this study is that coverage of Islam will be nuanced—likely to characterize Islam as multifaceted rather than as a monolith. This would be marked by differentiations between groups of Muslims and an emphasis on interpretations of Islam. This thesis will explore this hypothesis and attempt to gain an understanding of the rich discussion that is Islam in the context of Egypt’s English news.
While not a professional journalist, Abd al-Karim Nabil Sulaiman is an example of what can happen in covering Islam in Egypt. Raised in a religious family and very religious himself, Sulaiman used his blog as an outlet to criticize the growing tendency toward religious extremism he sensed in Egypt. Sulaiman, better known by his blogging name Kareem Amer, was known on his blog for offering stinging critique of the Mubarak government in Egypt and of Al Azhar, a powerful Islamic university in Egypt. On his blog, Sulaiman wrote that he wanted to open a law firm to protect the rights of Muslim and Arab women. In February 2007, the Egyptian government sentenced Sulaiman to three years in prison for “incitement to hatred of Islam” and one year for “insulting the president” (FreeKarim, 2009; Bryson, 2009; Freedom House, 2008). Sulaiman has become a lightning rod in the debate over human rights in Egypt with supporters holding rallies in numerous places across the globe and maintaining a website that perpetuates Sulaiman’s story. Sulaiman can be seen as emblematic of the struggles in the Egypt press. Egyptian journalists are increasingly willing to push the limits of their society, at their own peril, to write and report on subjects they believe are vital for the Egyptian public and for other Muslims. But the Egyptian government is still willing to imprison those journalists (Doha Debates, 2006).

Egypt is a country of contradictions. The Egyptian constitution explicitly spells out a free press system. In practice, this does not take place. Literature indicates numerous instances in which journalists have been imprisoned, tortured and harassed for their work. Yet despite the numerous obstacles facing the Egyptian press, journalists are
more and more willing to face the risks to bring their ideas into public discourse. And in this arena, dialogue on Islam is especially sensitive.

**Theoretical Framework**

It’s worthwhile to note some of what is assumed in this research. This research does take for granted that news plays a part in shaping the ideas of a community and a people (Allan, 1999). In a very real way, journalism is a manufactured product created from meetings between journalists and institutions. Journalism not only constructs reality but creates it (Schudson, 2003). And thus, journalism is important. It is also assumed that journalists, while often well-meaning individuals, are imperfect and cannot present all aspects of every story. They are mediators and under different definitions of objectivity, they do better or worse jobs at presenting the information they gather. Journalists construct reality for an audience based on their orientation as an “interpretive community” (Zelizer, 1997). What journalists present is framed by what they have access to culturally, politically and intellectually (McNair, 1998; Rosen, 1999; Allan, 1999; Pauly, 1999; Schudson, 1998; Schudson, 2003). Journalists can’t cover stories they don’t know exist.

What is news? News is events. News is processed information (Tuchman, 1997). News is “something that newspeople make, but this does not mean they make it up” (Rosen, 1999). News is more than just what happened in a given day. A single event can metaphorically be just one tree and, to focus on it, is to ignore the forest that tree represents.
Journalists…give us timely information about matters of common importance; they entertain and enlighten us with compelling stories; they act as our surrogate or watchdog before the high and mighty, asking sharp questions and demanding straight answers; they expose wrongdoing and the abuse of public trust; and they put before us a range of views, through opinion forums marked as such (Rosen, 1999: 281).

News is an arena of public discourse where different voices can compete in either the same publication or in different ones of competing ideologies. And it has been argued that journalism is an innately “democratic” practice—which is perhaps why it has been met with respect in non-democratic countries (Rosen, 1999; McNair, 1998).

News development in the Arab world doesn’t have radically different assumptions. The main aim of news was to guide officials and governors, helping them to improve their administration (Ayalon, 1995). And news media are still seen as a sign of modernization and industrialization in the area. Mellor, echoing Edward Said, noted that news is knowledge and “since knowledge is power, then news is power” (Mellor, 2005; Said, 1981; Allan, 1999).

But news goes through a process of production. An event cannot be completely recreated in a raw form for a plethora of interpretations. An event is encoded, framed by a newsperson, transmitted and then decoded (Hall, 1980). This can mean that an event encoded by a newsperson may unintentionally include encoding of which the newsperson wasn’t aware, so that when decoded, the reader gets a very different impression of the piece than was intended. The intended reading is what Hall calls a ‘preferred reading’
(Hall, 1980). But the preferred reading doesn’t prevent readers from taking their own reading out of a given work.

A number of things go into a journalist’s encoding process. A journalist’s encoding is of course shaped by his interior predispositions: background, worldview, etc. (Stocking and Gross, 1989). But a journalist’s encoding is also shaped by external factors (McNair, 1998; Soloski, 1999). McNair (1998) lays many of these out:

Those factors…are experienced by the journalist as external forces acting on his or her work: pressures emanating from the demands, reasonable or unreasonable, of politicians and proprietors; pressures of the market in which the journalist’s work must be packaged and sold and over which he or she has relatively little control; and pressures caused by the new technologies which continually impact on the production process. Underpinning all this, however, is the professional status of the journalist and the collective character of the work she or he does. The journalist is a professional communicator whose work is structured and shaped by a variety of practices, conventions and ethical norms as well as by the constraints and limitations imposed by the fact that journalism is a complex production process (McNair, 1998: 61).

It’s easy to see from the above quote that the concept of objectivity plays a key role in a journalist’s life.

Indeed it’s hard to get very far in any discussion of news without discussing objectivity. McNair notes that objectivity is an appeal for trust in which readers suspend disbelief long enough to trust what is shared by the journalist. This appeal is made even in situations where the facts of a situation may not be fully known. Objectivity requires a
separation of fact from opinion, a balanced account, and a validation of journalistic statements by reference to authorities of title or experience (McNair, 1998; Tuchman, 1999). Entman describes it as requiring a “depersonalization,” to keep reports from including a reporter’s ideology; and balance, to present the views of multiple parties, while remaining neutral in the process (Entman, 1989).

Entman’s definition of objectivity could be accused of being an exercise in mental gymnastics. How does one “depersonalize?” Unfortunately, that definition is often used as a straw man in the discussion of objectivity (Tuchman, 1999). In Rosenstiel and Kovach’s discussion of objectivity, objectivity works as a newsroom process of verification. In their objectivity, the question isn’t whether an article is biased, it’s whether there is verifiable/documentable information to support the article. They add that this concept thrives in a newsroom diverse not just in ethnicity but in ideology and backgrounds – one where journalists can be checked and balanced (Rosenstiel and Kovach, 2001). This process helps journalists in a newsroom take hold of a common, or at least similar, set of news values.

But it would be a mistake to assume that Egyptians hold all the same news values as Westerners. The next two sections will focus on the press in Egypt and Islamic views on the press. These subjects will help provide some context for what news values might go into a discussion of covering Islam for Egyptian news outlets (Mellor, 2005; Ramez, 2007).
The Press in Egypt

At every stage of mass media development, Egypt has held a reputation as the leader in the production of content in the Arab world (Abdulla, 2005). And while Egypt has more than 500 news print publications and broadcast entities, the government plays more than a major role in press ownership and business structure. The president appoints the editors of the top three newspapers, *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar*, and *Al-Gomhorya*. That said, Egyptians have access to news via satellite channels and Internet, which were accessed by more than 10 percent of the population in 2009. In addition, Egypt now boasts a wide array of blogs – an increasing number of them journalistic (Freedom House, 2009; Lynch, 2009; Abdulla, 2005; Khazen, 1999). But those who cover and publish news in Egypt are in a precarious situation.

Al-Jazeera journalist Huwaida Taha Mitwalli saw this precarious situation firsthand. A month before Sulaiman’s sentence, in January 2007, government officials detained Mitwalli and charged her with “possessing and giving false pictures about the internal situation in Egypt that could undermine the dignity of the country” (Freedom House, 2008). She was sentenced to six months in prison and fined EGP 20,000 or US $3600. In September 2008, three editors—Anwar al-Hawari, Mahmoud Ghalab, and Amir Salem—who write for the Wafd opposition party’s newspaper were sentenced to two years in prison for publishing “false news.” As mentioned earlier, censorship is forbidden in Egypt’s constitution, but the Egyptian government has passed several laws that clearly allow for censorship (Black, 2009; Kalb and Socolovsky, 1999). In 2009, Egypt expanded its Emergency Law. The law states that journalists accused of spreading
news damaging to the president or heads of state can be imprisoned for up to five years. The Emergency Law gives the president the right to suspend basic freedoms: fines and sentences like those listed above can be implemented without trial and news organizations can be censored or closed in the name of national security (Freedom House, 2009).

Yet despite all that has happened in the past few years, Washington, D.C.-based think tank Freedom House, which studies the state of global human rights, moved Egypt from a “not free” press country to “partially free” (Freedom House, 2008; Freedom House, 2009; Sullivan and Abed-Kotb, 1999). On their website, Freedom House explained that the move was done “in recognition of the courage of Egyptian journalists to cross ‘red lines’ that previously restricted their work and in recognition of the greater range of viewpoints represented in the Egyptian media and blogosphere” (Freedom House, 2008).

Taboos and Censorship

Historically, Islam isn’t the easiest subject to cover critically. In practice, what often causes crackdowns on journalists is public outcry (Eltahawy, 2007; Khazen, 1999). The problem is that reporting about Islam can very easily cause a ruckus (el Mohiebb, 2003; Isherwood 2008; Alterman, 1998; Mellor, 2008; Eltahawy, 2007).

Alterman (1998) in “New Media, New Politics?” claims that four different taboos bring about censorship in Arab countries, including Egypt. Alterman is one of several
authors surveyed who write more broadly about the “Arab press,” but many of the things he notes are key for understanding the Egyptian press.

There are generally four grounds for censorship in the Arab world today. The first has to do with the bounds of political debate. Whereas every Arab country has some degree of free debate, in each there are "red lines" that cannot be crossed. These red lines often have to do with Islamist opposition forces...The second and related taboo is criticism of a country's rulers or their families. From Morocco to Iraq, rulers may not be criticized by name in the domestic media (Alterman, 1998: 46).

A famous example of the second taboo was of the Moroccan leader Hosni Mubarak's sons. After a regional newspaper advertised an upcoming issue in which they would reveal details of the sons' personal corruption, the sons successfully sued the news organization to keep them from printing it. Then to add insult to injury, they sued the paper a second time for false advertising by promising a story they never delivered to the public (Alterman, 1998; Khazen, 1999).

The third taboo has to do with writing of a religious nature that might cause undue dissension in a country. Islam is the majority religion in Egypt, but there remains disagreement regarding what the proper practice of Islam requires.

Within the generally acceptable bounds of discussion are debates over the nature of Islamic finance, cultural conflict with Western secularism and the role of women in the family and in the workplace. What are generally barred are discussions that seek to delegitimize Muslim groups or that incite violence against religious minorities. This is often a floating line, and it is most clearly
crossed when Islamist partisans start tossing around the concepts of apostasy 
(*ridda*) or disbelief (*kufr*) to describe groups or individuals whose views they 
oppose. Whereas governments in the region often try to appropriate Islam to 
legitimize their own rule, they are vigilant in guarding against the possibility that 
some would use Islam to delegitimize either the government itself or groups in 

If a religious leader were caught doing something illegal or culturally 
unacceptable, the subject would be avoided if possible. But, if covered, the scandal would 
be acknowledged quickly before being killed. So covering Islam, especially if there is a 
story where Muslims clerics or Imams appear to be in the wrong, can be difficult.

The fourth taboo has to do with social and sexual mores....The guiding principle 
seems not to ban because of the nature of the materials themselves, but rather to ban 
those materials that are likely to cause – or have caused – 
offense among domestic clergy and those in public leadership (Alterman, 1998; Hafez, 2008).

But Alterman notes that censorship is perhaps a dying art. As the internet 
proliferates and as literacy proliferates, people will be using the internet for information 

Censorship over the internet is ...perhaps the easiest to circumvent, because many 
of those who want to circumvent restrictions are more technically savvy than 
those who want to keep the restrictions in place (Alterman, 1998: 47).

Alterman predicts that transnational media are the future of Arab journalism 
because they can do hard-hitting reporting of multiple countries without having to answer
to them. Off-shore media is a large area of growth, with reporters on the ground in the Arab world, but supplying information to publications based in England and France, who are exempt from censorship laws (Alterman, 1998; Khazen, 1999; Kalb and Socolovsky, 1998).

However, some scholars claim that Alterman’s taboos are a bit outdated in an era of pan-Arab media, where if one can’t get the information one needs locally, one need only tune into a source from over the border, ie. Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, etc. (Doha Debates, 2006; El-nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; Iskandar, 2007). But even if religion is not a taboo, it is still sensitive. Kai Hafez notes that in many ways, the media have served to stay political Islamic ideology. But he argues that more is expected out of the media than in the West (Hafez, 2008).

Without exaggeration one can view Arab media as a balancing power to the other great mobilizing force of the last decade, political Islam. While Islamists seek to mobilize people through moral rigor, social networks and political organizations, the media have inspired people’s minds through their liveliness, plurality, and dynamics. The old idea that a “triangle of taboos: politics, sex, and religion” expresses Arab culture is outdated in the media age. While religion is still sensitive, hedonism is an element of many Arab programs and it has become an acceptable part of life to debate politics (Hafez, 2008: 2).

One of the foundational books of the Arab press, The Arab Press (1979) then later, revised Arab Mass Media (2004) denotes several different types of press systems in the Arab world. They’re all worth noting because of the tensions between the systems as
they occur in Egypt (Rugh, 2004). And Rugh is worth discussing because of his centrality to the field of Arab news media.

**Rugh’s Typology**

Rugh argues that government shapes the media and, to a certain extent, the media shapes the government. This is particularly interesting in the Arab world because, while the Arab countries share numerous similarities, the environments can be vastly different as a result of the government in place.

The mass media play a larger role than other forms of communication in the daily lives of people everywhere, but especially in the Arab world. These media are consequently regarded by politicians and governments as having great political importance. In fact, the acquisition and distribution of news has been seen for a long time as a vital political function in society because the news items may have political impact very quickly on large numbers of people...The way government and society deal with this institution (mass media) is significant for an understanding of that government and society as well as of the mass communications process (Rugh, 2004: xiv).

It’s worth noting that in recent decades a great deal of change has come to the Arab world. Egypt went from a “Nassar-style totalitarian government” to a more liberal, modernized authoritarian government (Hafez, 2008). Hafez notes that in asserting control over the media the Egyptian government uses a “carrot-and-stick” approach. Reporting they like is rewarded, reporting they dislike is punished.
Rugh spends much of *Arab Mass Media* updating the information he'd obtained for *The Arab Press*. Whereas the press and the media were perhaps less developed at this time, the number of types of communication outlets has proliferated so that even the poorest Arab countries have television stations. By the late 1970s, all Arab countries not only had their own television stations but their own magazines and newspapers (Rugh, 2004). As in his previous work, Rugh (2004) uses a typology of the Arab Press that scholars either critique, praise or discard:

(1) The Mobilization Press- The press system where "the ruling group is aggressively dedicated to revolutionary change, and it has managed to eliminate all real organized public opposition domestically, but requires active support from the media to help achieve its stated goals and combat its declared enemies" (Rugh, 2004: 251).

(2) The Loyalist Press- is seated in countries where a "more traditional political system prevails; all are monarchies except Palestine, which has been dominated overwhelmingly by one man. No significant opposition exists, but the government, more satisfied with the status quo than intent on change, is content with passive acquiescence from the public and does not require the press to generate action" (Rugh, 2004: 251-252).

(3) The Diverse Press- it takes place in a "political environment where the public expression of a variety of opinions and viewpoints, including criticism of the government, is possible, and where the regime does not intervene to suppress all open dissent" (Rugh, 2004: 252). The government may occasionally take action against a news outlet, but it is rare and done primarily through the courts.
(4) The Transitional Press- Rugh labels this the press system of Egypt. This press system is a "mixed system in which the largest circulation print media are controlled directly by the government but smaller ones are owned by private individuals or parties, and they have some latitude to criticize those in power" (Rugh, 2004: 252). The government does try to restrict them at times, but it uses the courts as well and relies on journalists' self-censorship.

These types of press systems aren't an accidental byproduct of political realities, but an object of political calculation (Rugh, 2004; Kalb and Socolovsky, 1999). According to Rugh, the biggest indicator in determining the nature of the relationship between the press and the government is the diversity of press publications. In every Arab country, some media will be in complete support of government policy. The essential function of the diverse press – which allows it to have the freest press in the Arab World (in Morocco, Lebanon, Kuwait) – is the existence of a genuine opposition to the ruling party, which can function openly. If no public opposition is allowed, it follows that the press will be in one, uniform voice (Rugh, 2004).

Interestingly, the most tightly controlled media (radio and television) are the media which have given the Arab public the most freedom. While the media in their country may not air any news about local government, another country within close airwaves may be willing (Doha Debates, 2006; Sakr, 2007).

Rugh labels Egypt a “transitional press”—“transitional because it has undergone steady change for more than a decade and because the system itself remains under debate, and appears to be unsettled” (Rugh, 2004: 121).
There are other scholars who would debate Rugh’s typology, and their critiques are worth noting. Some critique that such substantial diversity exists in Arab nations and publics that developing any sort of typology is all but impossible (Iskandar, 2007; Mellor, 2005; Rugh, 2007; Ramez, 2007). Iskandar notes that Rugh “transplants classical typologies of media institutions wholesale from their Western contexts to the Arab world with only minor modifications that serve to affirm an increasingly outdated view of Arab media” (Iskandar, 2007).

Mellor and Rugh clearly have their differences. However Mellor and Rugh agree that censorship is a serious concern (Mellor, 2005).

Besides Al Azhar and government-mandated punishments, there are numerous other ways that censorship occurs. For instance, in June 2009, well-known Egyptian blogger and activist Wael Abbas was detained for 10 hours in the Cairo airport. Abbas is renowned for using his blog to report on police brutality and other human rights violations. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Abbas said he was afraid of being framed like Howaida Taha, an Al Jazeera journalist sentenced to six months in jail for “harming Egypt’s national interests” by “fabricating video footage of police torture” (Hassan, 2009). The videos posted by Abbas include a number that show Egyptian police officers torturing prisoners—one includes an officer who bound and sodomized a “bus driver as the latter tried to break up a dispute between police and a driver” (Hassan, 2009). Journalists who report on the sort of things Wael Abbas reports on are often intimidated into silence (McNeill, 2009).
Self-Censorship

With safety as a concern among journalists, it’s not surprising that the most dominant form of censorship in Egypt is self-censorship (Doha Debates, 2006; Ayalon, 1995; Rugh, 2004; Lynch, 2007; Khazen, 1999). Press censorship isn’t always legislated and economically motivated. Many times the harshest censor was the press itself.

According to Ayalon, Arabs see freedom of expression as a weapon that could either be used beneficially or destructively. AyJon argues that it is a part of Arab culture. Rafiq-al-Maqdisi, a Syrian author, told the following story to illustrate the destructiveness of freedom of expression:

It happened in 1908, following the restoration of the Ottoman constitution, in the Banyas district of the province of Ladhiqiyya. An angel walking from the town to the country met a villager on his way to Banyas, who asked him:

“What is new in town?”

“Freedom has been declared.”

“How come?”

“Our lord the Sultan has restored the constitution and imparted freedom.”

Whereupon the villager shouted at the top of his voice: “The world is free then!” and immediately grabbed a stick and started beating the angel for the world had become free! (Ayalon, 1995: 132)

Self-censorship is a response and reaction to the strong control measures on the press in Egypt. Some call it the “censorship of the street” (Jacquemond, 2008). One author notes: “You can always come to an accommodation with the official censorship, but how can you get along with people who are scattered from Alexandria to Aswan?”
The greatest government censorship in Egypt occurs on the subject of politics and the coverage of country leaders. Here too, Islam becomes involved. Politicians, in such instances, court opposing approaches, at once attempting to be anti-American, pro-West, secular and devoutly Muslim (Hammond, 2007). This is certainly the case with President Mubarak of Egypt (Mubarak, 2009; Hemingway, 2009; Zayan, 2009).

The control mechanisms in place in Arab societies are strong, encompassing the religious establishment and the state, with its media, police and official censorship bodies. On political issues, they engender a form of self-censorship (Hammond, 2007: 32).

**News Values, News Obstacles**

Ayalon says that journalists in Egypt face significantly more obstacles than those faced by the press in the West (Ayalon, 1995). Mellor argues that language may have something to do with this. When news writing first came into being, it demanded composition that was understood by a broad audience. However, journalistic writing grew from classical Arabic, which was used traditionally by intellectuals. This contrast resulted in two genres: a news genre (*khabar*) and a commentary genre (*maqal*). Mellor describes *khabar* as simple writing, that which seeks to answer the “Where, Who, When, Why, What, and How” while *maqal* is a prose commentary text (Mellor, 2005; Ramez, 2007). Mellor argues that the new generation of journalists would rather write commentaries than report the news, which is often more difficult and more dangerous. In addition, *maqal* has become the genre through which writers display their mastery of
Modern Standard Arabic. So the writing of *maqal* has become the peak of a journalist’s career (Mellor, 2005). In addition, *khabar* requires context and background information that many authors don’t believe inexperienced journalists can get (Mellor, 2005). This is especially problematic for citizen journalists (Vargas, 2009; Simon, 2009). Blogging and new media tools lend themselves toward political activism. They tend to be used more often for mobilizing political opposition groups rather than straight reporting (Lynch, 2007).

This leads to another obstacle journalism faces: a lack of professionals who take up the occupation. Schools of journalism are few, which means most journalists learn their trade on the job. As a result the credibility of news writers is lower than in the West (Rugh, 2004; Mellor, 2005). “Although there are today many competent Arab professional journalists, the economic and sometimes political risk in entering the profession has to some extent kept talented people away from it” (Rugh, 2004: 11).

Ayalon agreed. Ayalon noted, in talking about early Arab journalism, “one serious disadvantage in being a journalist was the low public image of the occupation.” Ayalon illustrates this with a story: “When Jurji Zaydan joined *al-Muqtatatf* as an administrator in 1887, his father’s reaction was, typically, strongly adverse. He wanted his son to study something more ‘decent,’ such as medicine or law. Still an amorphous activity, journalism had none of the prestige of either of the other two professions” (Ayalon, 1995: 221). A shortage of journalistic skills is a problem in professional Egyptian media.
But that said, there’s an increasing amount of training available for Egyptian media practitioners (Mellor, 2005). Ironically, the programs often considered the best are those run by foreigners, not those run by journalists in their own country. But then journalists face the problem of a language barrier. Many journalists wait and hope for programs that are run by foreigners, but in their tongue.

Oddly, training programs targeting Arabs and conducted by non-Arabs are usually more beneficial and closer to the participants’ needs, interests and desires than those conducted by Arabs, who are often detached from the realities of Arab youth (Menassat, 2009).

Finally, a key obstacle yet to be overcome in Egyptian media is the idea of journalistic objectivity (Hafez, 2008). In American journalism, there are ethical understandings of what “good journalism” is as opposed to “bad journalism.” And while these ethics are by no means all-encompassing, large organizations of journalists can support or criticize journalism on these grounds. But according to Hafez, this is less developed in Egypt. Values differ widely in what makes journalism “good” or “bad.” To some, good journalism is simply what permits journalists to keep their job and pleases the government. To others, good journalism opposes the government. Hafez claims that what makes good journalism, in Egypt, is often defined by the audience and readership (Hafez, 2008; Mellor, 2005).
Islam Covered by the Press

It is also useful, in trying to understand the press coverage of Islam, to examine what Islam thinks of the press. Since most journalists in Egypt are Muslim, by religion and by culture, understanding how Islam affected the rise of news is imperative.

The press in Egypt is closely tied, for better or worse, with the Islamic Modernist movement—since the press was a tool of the movement. First, it would be useful to define the term Islamic Modernist. There are numerous definitions of the term; indeed nearly every Islamic thinker has a different definition of the term. Much of the debate centers on how one defines Modernity and how one defines Islam. According to Voll (2009), the key to Islamic Modernism is the ability of Islam to be compatible with modern science and modern reason (Voll, 2009). Esposito (1998) notes:

Unlike conservative Muslims…Islamic modernists asserted the need to revive the Muslim community through a process of a reinterpretation or reformulation of their Islamic heritage in light of the contemporary world. Though they shared with pre-modern Islamic revivalist movements a call for renewal and reform through *ijtihad*, Islamic modernists did not simply seek to restore the past (ie. early Islamic practice). Rather they advocated a reinterpretation and reformulation of their Islamic heritage to respond to the political, cultural and scientific challenge of the West and modern life. They attempted to show the compatibility (and thus acceptability) of Islam with modern ideas and institutions (Esposito, 1998: 48).

So Islamic Modernism is a religious interpretation that attempts to engage with modern life (Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, 1999).
From the very beginning of the Islamic Modernist movement, newspapers played a key role. Charles Kurzman (2002) notes:

The greatest discursive innovation of the modernist Islamic movement was the periodical press, which it established in virtually every community of the Islamic world…The relatively low cost and wide distribution of newspapers, magazines, and journals opened a stream of words that reached a relatively large readership (and listenership, as items were read aloud). The modernist Islamic movement held great hopes for its impact (Kurzman, 2002: 15).

Rifa’a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi (2002), who is often considered a thinker who bridged religion and modernity, saw news as a tremendously powerful tool for improving society. One of the great merits of the newspaper is that if a man does an outstanding deed, whether good or bad, it is reported in the paper, and made known to all people high and low. Thus the doer of good deeds is encouraged and the doer of evil ones restrained. If a man is wronged by another, he states his case in the newspaper to make it known to high and low, without any alteration in, or deviation from, facts (al-Tahtawi, 2002: 33).

It wasn’t long before someone in Egypt made use of this innovation. The Ottoman ruler of Egypt just before ‘Abduh’s time, Muhammad Ali, was a patron of the press. But even then the press was under strict government control. “Muhammad Ali (1805-1848) patronized the introduction of the press as a way to bring about the modernization of the country, and his grandson Ismail (1863-1879) followed in his footsteps in the shrewd utilization of the press in his modernization plans” (Mellor, 2005: 28)
Ali actually bought shares of the French paper *Le Temps* to get publicity for his policies and offered subsidies to his own papers. News media were, and are, seen as emblematic of Egypt’s modernization (Mellor, 2005). Ali founded the Bulaq state-run printing press in 1819-1820 and sent Egyptians, including al-Tahtawi, on educational missions to Europe—mainly to learn printing practices (Kendall, 2006).

**Muhammad ‘Abduh**

Muhammad ‘Abduh, credited as the founder of modernist Islamic thought, is an example of a thinker who saw newspapers as an essential tool of modern Islamic society. His life is another paradoxical example of the use of the press. ‘Abduh was born in Lower Egypt and attended Al Azhar. In the 1870s, ‘Abduh served as the editor-in-chief of *Al-Waqae’a Al-Masreya*, or “The Egyptian Events,” Egypt’s official newspaper at the time and the oldest daily newspaper in Egypt and the Middle East. In that role, he “helped form public opinion and lobby for reform of public education” (Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, 1999; Hourani, 1983). Considering the future of journalism in Egypt, it is perhaps ironic that ‘Abduh, a key influence on the press, was exiled from Egypt for his critique on the government and written support of a revolt (Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, 1999).

Albert Hourani, in his discussion of ‘Abduh’s exile, notes: “It was in this period that the newspaper of opinion began to play an important part in Egyptian political life” (Hourani, 1983). Fazlur Rahman also noted the influence ‘Abduh had on the future of the press, saying that the emergence of the popular press owed much to his influence (Rahman, 1982). ‘Abduh demonstrated that there was nothing inherently wrong with
newspapers – though they were a European innovation – in fact showed that Islamic thought and ideas could be disseminated through the use of the medium.

After a time studying under noted Islamic thinker Jamal Al-Afghani in Paris, France, ‘Abduh returned to Egypt and was appointed Mufti, an interpreter of Muslim law. ‘Abduh held the position until his death.

As a practitioner of journalism, ‘Abduh was a fervent supporter of the craft. He even praised newspapers in a poem, in which he compared them to the legacy of the Egyptian pyramids. He noted that newspapers “alert the unattentive” and called them the “tongue of heavenly secrets” (Kurzman, 2002). Yet despite these praises, when ‘Abduh died in 1905, the Caliph ordered that nothing be reported in newspapers of either his life or death (Sedgwick, 2009).

‘Abduh and Al-Afghani both wrote for the early Al-Ahram, or “The Pyramids”, which is now the highest circulation newspaper in Egypt. For ‘Abduh and al-Afghani, newspapers expressed their view of progress—each issue superseded the previous and the informed person had to keep up with news and debates (Kurzman, 2002). Yet even in the early days of Islamic modernism, newspapers were controversial. As mentioned earlier, ‘Abduh’s writings led to his short-term exile; but in addition, newspapers were vulnerable to attacks of “shallowness” because authors didn’t have seminary training and used a minimum of scholarly citations in their writing (Kurzman, 2002).

The development of “Western” institutions, like the news organization, in an Islamic framework was key to ‘Abduh’s philosophy/theology. But very soon after the beginning of the conversation between Islam and Modernism, a brand of secular thinkers
emerged who took many of ‘Abduh and al-Afghani’s ideas to an extreme. They began to argue for the wholesale adoption of Western institutions, leaving Islam completely out of the picture. One of ‘Abduh’s students, Muhammad Rashid Rida had to argue for keeping Islam as the framework for public discourse. Rida was the editor of an Egyptian reform magazine, *Al Manar* (Bluhm-Warn, 1997). He argued against the rise of secularism: “Truly, we are in dire need for renewal and renewers. Anything that could preserve our national character and religious heritage, and promote us in the paths of civic advancement has been revoked and corroded” (Rida, 2002: 78).

**Tariq Ramadan**

As modernism gave way to the contemporary age, another thinker’s views on the press are worth noting for their impact on shaping the Islamic perspective on the press. Previous Islamic modernist thinkers many times founded and contributed to newspapers and news publications. But often it was with the desire to control, or use the medium for religious/political purposes. Tariq Ramadan, an Arab-Muslim who grew up in Switzerland, is a contemporary Muslim thinker who encourages a reinterpretation of Quran, specifically to aid Muslims living in non-Muslim majority countries (Ramadan, 2009). Ramadan is also the grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Ramadan advocates a different perspective on the press than his modernist predecessors.

He notes that the diversity and quantity of news outlets, like the many seen in Egypt, says little about their quality and little about their freedom in terms of coverage. He argues that Islamic thinkers and intellectuals should be genuinely concerned about the
state of the press in many Islamic countries (Ramadan, 2009). He notes that free press would be helpful in fighting the problems often seen in Islamic countries where corruption is rampant.

One cannot be content with repeating the ideality of “Islamic values” outside and beyond the world’s complexity…It has become important to engage in thorough reflection about the media and particularly the alternative media. Businesspeople, journalists, and communications specialists should be able to bring their skills together to think through and produce new strategies and new modes of communication…We must also commit ourselves to an ethical stance in the media and mass communication that is one of resistance and that must, to be efficient, become specialized, professionalized and institutionalized the world over (Ramadan, 2009: 284-285).

One can see through the history of Islamic modernist thought on the press that many of the challenges and obstacles the press faced then are still faced now. Frequently, Islamic leaders and Islamic reformers in the modern age used the newspaper as a means to disseminate their philosophy. At times this brought editors and writers in conflict with the state and with the culture. The understanding of what a newspaper is has changed in the past two centuries. More newspapers are attempting to mediate discourse, as is seen in American and European newspapers, though the use of newspapers for philosophical/theological purposes certainly still occurs.

It could be that the very discussion of the press and public discourse as a human right is modern, which is perhaps why modernist Islamic thinkers view it so highly (Sachedina, 2009). Many who oppose international human rights initiatives assert that
Islam has a much longer tradition of human rights than Western civilization. But Mayer notes that much of the current concerns for human rights is recent, and perhaps owed to Islamic modernism (Mayer, 2006). Unfortunately, that which is modern is not always highly respected in Islamic countries.

In the Muslim world, modernist discourse is associated with an agnostic secular culture that defines the public forum and it’s discourse. It is culturally illegitimate to speak about the form of secularism that not only asserts hegemony over discourse in the public forum but also aspires to transform Islam into its image and likeness (Sachedina 191).

Abdulaziz Sachedina, a former student of Iranian Shi’a thinker Ali Shariati, claims that Islam has always been a community “directly involved in setting the purpose of government and regulating interhuman relationships in society.” But the author says that states have had weakening influence in directing the moral and political life of their nationals, and so Islam has often stepped in to provide guidelines for public order (Sachedina [2009] 45, 191). In Egypt, this is seen in the influence of Al Azhar in censorship and basic self-censorship of the country.

**Islam on the Press Today**

However, it would be a mistake to think that today the press is still simply the tool of modernist Islamic thinkers. One of the biggest developments in Egyptian media is the degree of involvement from the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood is a Sunni transitional movement and the world’s oldest Islamic political group (Cleveland,
2009; Esposito, 2002). They argue that Egyptian society has been corrupted by the West and urge for a return to Sharia law—a rule of law based on the Quran as the basis for all Muslim life, religious, political, societal (Esposito, 2002). The slogan of their sect is “Islam is the solution” (Interview 8). The rise of pan-Arab media has given the Muslim Brotherhood a niche. A rising number of blogs are run by members of the Muslim Brotherhood and they also have their own newspapers (Richter, 2008; Bunt, 2000; Hofheinz, 2007). And a recent content analysis proves that while the Muslim Brotherhood has their own niche media, the content they produce enters the public square, influencing coverage at news sources including *Al Ahram, Al-Masry Al-Youm,* and *Al Wafd* (Richter, 2008).

But how is Islam covered in the press?

**The Coverage of Islam**

The majority of the research done on the coverage of Islam centers on Western coverage of Islam. Little English language research could be found that investigates how Islam is covered in Muslim-majority countries. However, some seminal works have been written on the subject of news coverage of Islam in the West and a few recent works on how Islam is covered/discussed in Indian English and Urdu publications.

The key study in this investigation was written by Edward Said, called *Covering Islam.* In this book, Said examines American coverage of the Iranian revolution. He claims that, if knowledge is power, then Western media is tremendously powerful because they control what the world knows about Islam. The Western media has been
selective in its choice of images about Islam, portraying Islam as oppressive, with symbols like hijab; outmoded, with hangings, beheadings; and generally backward (Said, 1981). His introduction, while critical on Western media, claims that there have been reasons for the negative coverage:

The general state of the Islamic world with its decline in productivity and well-being, including such phenomena as censorship, the relative absence of democracy, the dismaying prevalence of dictatorships, and fiercely repressive and authoritarian states…seems backward and cruel; this includes basically Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, and Algeria (Said, 1981: xv).

Said’s work has been followed by a number of other works examining news media coverage of Islam.

**Orientalism**

Hafez notes that pre-9/11, press coverage of Islam manifested in two paradigms: “globalization” and a “clash of civilizations” (Hafez, 2000). He noted that coverage of Islam isn’t just problematic because of inaccurate or biased reporting but also because of socio-psychological stereotypes and the commercial interests of media institutions (Hafez, 2000). It’s not always the reporter’s fault, sometimes the fault lies with the one who signs the checks.

Elizabeth Poole has performed a number of content analytic studies on British newspapers to see how they cover Islam. Poole found that there are a limited number of frameworks used in representing British Muslims in the press (Poole, 2002). “Although
there is a high degree of homogeneity in the themes associated with Islam present in the mainstream press, we should not assume total homogeneity” (Poole, 2000: 175). She also found that often the description “Muslim” implied someone who lived overseas. Her work drew attention to the consistently negative depictions of Muslims in the press. While coverage was slightly better in liberal presses than in more conservative papers, on the whole, the majority of news was negatively slanted (Poole, 2002).

Although coverage of British Islam appeared to be increasing, it still constituted only a small proportion of total coverage of Islam. This suggested that ‘Islam’ continued to be interpreted as predominantly a foreign phenomenon. While coverage of Islam accounted for only a small proportion of news coverage as a whole, Islam had a greater salience than any other religions traditionally associated with the East (Poole, 2002: 247)

The work as a whole argues that Orientalism is still a reality. Orientalism—a term popularized by Edward Said—claims that there is a basic predisposition in Western society to see the East as “backward” and in need of being “oriented” (Said, 1979; Said, 1981; Poole, 2002; Hafez, 2000). Similar studies followed in the wake of 9-11 and with findings that, unsurprisingly, were even more slanted toward negative coverage in Britain, the United States and Australia (Poole, 2006; Richardson, 2006; Manning, 2006; Elgamri, 2008). Manning notes:

Australians seem to see Muslims through their press coverage of international affairs. However, it is skewed heavily towards conflicts in the Middle East rather than through their closest neighbor, Indonesia. This pre-dates September 11,
Such coverage can result in an identity crisis for Muslims who feel caught between being “Western” and being “Muslim.” The western media portrays Islam negatively so thus one can be left feeling either “non-Western” or “non-Muslim” (Farouqui, 2009). Farouqui notes: “The common Muslim is caught between the increasingly strident anti-Muslim propaganda of the West and the equally strident religious fervour of the ‘jihadi’ Muslims” (Farouqui, 2009: 3). Farouqi’s book, Muslims and Media Images, argues that negative coverage of Islam isn’t just Western, as it takes place in India too—which has a sizable, yet minority, Muslim population. The collection of essays examines films, English print media and Urdu print media before concluding on widespread negative coverage (Dryland, 2009).

But does this occur in a Muslim majority country like Egypt? The goal of this research is to look at a small segment of the Egyptian press, the English-language press, and see what the coverage of Islam looks like. The next section will document how this study hopes to examine the coverage.
CHAPTER TWO: STUDY METHODS

The key question to answer in this study is “how is Islam covered in Egyptian English-language publications?” Previous content analysis studies and research projects have overwhelmingly found that Islam is characterized negatively in the Western Press (Said, 1979; Said, 1981; Poole, 2006; Richardson, 2006; Manning, 2006; Elgamri, 2008). Is Islam characterized differently in the Egyptian press? A sense of how Islam is covered in a Muslim-majority country not only fills in a vital research gap but provides a resource for Western journalists who want to provide better coverage of Islam.

This study is two-fold: a news framing content analysis (quantitative) and interviews with Egyptian journalists at English-language publications (qualitative). The content analysis will provide us with an understanding of the themes that appear in conjunction with Islam in the journalistic product. The interviews will help us understand the story behind the stories—the motivations and the socio-cultural context in which journalists operate in covering Islam. Together they’ll provide a picture of how Islam is covered in Egyptian English-language publications.

Content Analysis

Before attempting to describe this study, it’s important to understand the study’s nature. Krippendorff describes a content analysis as

Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.

…Techniques are expected to be reliable. More specifically, research techniques
should result in findings that are replicable. That is, researchers working at different points in time and perhaps under different circumstances should get the same results when applying the same technique to the same data (Krippendorff, 2004: 18).

The type of content analysis employed here is a news framing analysis. This analysis examines the content in terms of the topics that frame the subject matter. In news framing analysis, there is an appreciation that reality is socially constructed. So how Islam is viewed in the United States can have a lot to do with how the subject is framed. This is equally true for Egypt (Johnson-Cartee, 2005).

Working journalists are constrained by personal [background/experience], professional standards, organizational culture, and self-held audience images. News creation is truly a social construction, involving a multitude of present, past, and anticipated distant or future forces influencing the newsperson (Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 108-109).

News framing recognizes that there are certain strategic rituals journalists go through in the production of stories. Stories are crafted to fit formulaic metaphors repeated in journalistic discourse (Johnson-Cartee, 2005; D’Angelo and Kuypers, 2010). Often this occurs through exemplification, whereby a dramatized account of individual, family or homogenized group comes to represent a larger group. It is the method reporters use to “represent” a given issue. Framing topics with these sorts of accounts can change the direction of discourse on a given issue (Johnson-Cartee, 2005; Entman, 2010; Van Gorp, 2010; Zillman and Brosius, 2000).
And often this action of framing a story is entirely subconscious—simply a result of a journalist’s own background and cultural dispositions:

Values, narratives and archetypes are couched in almost any form of communication, both popular and informative, because they embody the fears, hopes, and prejudices of the cultures in which their audiences live. Journalists already make themselves familiar with these culturally shared elements in the process of socialization that precedes their journalistic training and experience. Therefore, they are often not aware of adopting, using and reproducing them in the news (Van Gorp, 2010: 87).

This sort of research has similarly been employed by Elizabeth Poole (2002; 2006). Poole was faced with the question of how Islam was covered in the British “objective” press—as opposed to British tabloids. She was able to use her quantitative analysis to argue that coverage of Muslims, both British and foreign, was overwhelmingly negative (Poole, 2002). She found there was a special emphasis on equivocating Muslims as “foreign” and a frequent attachment to radicalism and terrorism. This study was done pre-9-11. These conclusions were only exacerbated in a study of post-9-11 coverage (Poole, 2006).

Poole’s studies used the article as the unit of analysis and for each individual article, she pinpointed the topics that appeared (Gunter, 2000). She notes that even when Muslim groups appear and set the agenda for the article, “it is in the way events are framed that gives newspapers the ability to define Islam for their audience” (Poole, 2002: 66). In Reporting Islam, the topics used to frame the discussion of “Muslim” included: education, fundamentalism, relationship to Christianity, racism, Muslim community,
gender, government, politics, cultural atrocities, Islamophobia, anti-Jewish sentiments, food, Conflict with the West, and others (Poole, 2002). In her post-9-11 study, Poole limited the topics to: terrorism, politics, war in Iraq, education, discrimination, race relations, media, relationships, crime and asylum (Poole, 2006). This study will follow a similar procedure of presence and absence coding with the unit of analysis as the article, but in an Egyptian context.

It’s important to note that this study cannot answer how Islam is covered in Arabic-language publications. Scholarship has already noted a difference in coverage between Arabic and English publications (Eltahawy, 2007). This content analysis will apply only to English-language publications. The reasoning for this is practical—this researcher knows little Arabic and discussion with scholars in the field revealed that there are few reliable internet translators for a project this intensive. It also has to be understood that journalists may write differently for an Arabic audience as opposed to English audience, which is primarily elites and foreigners (Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 107).

However, there has been no content analysis of this kind even in English-language publications. And since the emphasis of this project is on the journalists – the producers— and not the audience – the consumers—the research here is just as valuable. This study could also be easily looked at as a study of online Egyptian media, as all three of the chosen media have primary online dissemination components, the archives of which were used in this study. Two of the chosen media outlets, Daily News Egypt and Al-Masry Al-Youm, are online only news organizations while Al Ahram Weekly is a print
institution, which also comes out online. This key difference may help explain some of the findings later show in the raw numbers (pages 73-74).

I will first describe the reasoning behind the publications chosen for the news framing content analysis and also note a publication examined, but not chosen for the analysis. This paper will examine three English-language Egyptian news sites for study: *Al Ahram Weekly, Daily News Egypt* and *Al-Masry Al-Youm*.

**Al Ahram Weekly**

*Al Ahram* is the largest news organization in Egypt, it is the largest circulation print news component in the Middle East with a circulation near 700,000 (Rugh, 2004). *Al Ahram* operates in Arabic, however they have a created a weekly print English language edition which they also archive once a week online—*Al Ahram Weekly*. The online archives stretch back to 1998. Because the edition is weekly, it has less content per week than others, but the sheer number of years archived make it rich with material.

The website’s archives can be explored with a Google search bar. This allows for easy subject searches, but one can’t break down the search into a specific date range. There is a function on the website that allows one to search for specific editions, but one can’t search for specific subjects within the editions. So, in other words, one can search by edition or by subject—but not both at the same time. The best way, although not ideal, to search for specific issues in a date range is to use the Google intrawebsite search and put the month/year into the field with the subject matter. Several of the weekly issues
cross month lines (Oct. 29-Nov. 5), which created duplicate material that later had to be eliminated during the selection process

In a search for the term “Islam,” the website spotted 4500 distinct articles that referred to the term. A month-by-month search showed approximately 300 distinct articles in a search that spanned Oct. 2009 to January 2010. In a search for the term “Muslim,” the website spotted about 450 distinct articles from Oct. 2009 to January 2010.

**Daily News Egypt**

The *Daily News Egypt* is the only independent daily in Egypt that prints only in English. Its website search function is not functional (i.e. search terms for “Islam,” “Muslim,” President,” “Prime Minister,” and “Egypt” all revealed no results or an error screen). However, the *Daily News Egypt* is the only English-edition newspaper archived by LexisNexis. LexisNexis provided an optimal search function for examining the newspapers archives.


The *Daily News Egypt* makes an interesting subject to study in comparison to *Al Ahram Weekly* and *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, as the *Daily News Egypt* has no Arabic component. Also its independent ownership contrasts with the state-run nature of *Al Ahram Weekly* and the *Egyptian Gazette.*
Al-Masry Al-Youm

*Al-Masry Al-Youm* started only in 2003. It is an independent news organization that operates both in English and Arabic. Newsroom journalists either write separate stories for the English edition, or, often, translate Arabic language stories into English. The news source is relatively new and the English edition newer so the majority of their online materials only stretch back to October 2009. A few occasional pieces from 2008 and 2006 appeared but their appearance was haphazard as opposed to materials post-October. An email query of how to access material before October was not returned.

The search function organizes materials based on relevance, but can’t be sorted by date. A search for “Islam” turned up 170 distinct articles with most occurring after October 2009.

*Al-Masry Al-Youm* differs from *Al Ahram Weekly* in that it’s an independent news organization and it’s fairly new. The website has a heavy emphasis on citizen journalism and blogs. And *Al-Masry Al-Youm* differs from *Daily News Egypt* in that the website does have an Arabic language component that shares content with the English website.

Other Publications Considered

This study also considered the *Egyptian Gazette*. The *Egyptian Gazette* is a daily English-language newspaper, which is a subsidiary of *Al Gomhuria*, one of the three largest circulation newspapers. *Al Gomhuria* is also a state-run news agency, as is the *Egyptian Gazette* by extension. The Gazette has a long history in Egypt. It was first published in 1880 and has a daily circulation of about 20,000 (Rugh, 2004). The
publication circulates mainly at hotels for tourists. The online archival system at the
*Egyptian Gazette* is very rough, with searches only going back three months. The search
function lists only the headlines of stories where the search terms appear. The 
occurrances are not marked by dates, authors, or issue number. In the space provided by
their archives, *The Egyptian Gazette* has a lot of material, but it would be difficult
material to examine. In an email from the editor, he noted that their print archives are
very extensive but research would require time in Egypt. In the end, findings at the
*Egyptian Gazette* would likely not provide information much different than *Al Ahram
Weekly*, which is also state-run and had far more accessible and navigable archives.

**Research Method**

The reasoning behind the choice of timeframe for this study has several layers. In
order to get a general sense of how Islam is covered, this project wanted to avoid
selecting negative time frames such as those surrounding terrorist activities performed in
the name of Islam (ie. 9-11, the London bombing, the Mumbai attacks), which could
unfairly skew the material. But this project also sought to find a recent time frame where
Islam was a large topic of discussion. So the time frame chosen was October 31, 2009
through February 1, 2010. As discussed below, the time frame was optimal for that sort
of discourse. In preliminary searches, it became clear that there was far too much material
to analyze more than three months of material. And even those three months of material
turned up nearly 2000 articles.
October 31 was the day Mustafa Mahmoud, a celebrated but controversial Islamic thinker died. Mahmoud, later in his career, wrote for several newspapers and was known as a critic of former president Nassar. As it turns out, there was a great deal of discussion on Islam surrounding Mahmoud’s death (Said, 2009). But several other events, which occurred around the same time, made this a key time for a content analysis.

The three months following Mahmoud’s death was also a time of rising conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood. The conservative Islamic group, described in chapter one, has been recently gaining seats in the Egyptian parliament and there is concern that the Muslim Brotherhood will seize power in Egypt (“Egypt,” 2006). In mid-October 2009, the spiritual guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Mahdi Akef, stepped down from leadership. So during the time frame of the content analysis, there was a great deal of discussion over who would take over the Muslim Brotherhood. A new, younger and more moderate Muslim Brotherhood leader was chosen in mid-January (Tammam, 2010). The tensions with the Muslim Brotherhood were also seen in the Egyptian government’s arrest of several key Muslim Brotherhood leaders (“Brotherhood,” 2009).

Conflict with Coptic Christians also broke out during the time frame examined and often discussions of Islam come up in discussion of Muslim-Coptic relations in Egypt. Coptic Christians are actually the original inhabitants of Egypt. The word “Copt” originally referred to the Egyptian people. The majority of Egyptians converted to Islam in the seventh century, leaving “Coptic Christians” as a minority ever since (“Coptic Orthodox,” 2010). There were several riots after Christmas in which Christians and Muslims died. Some claimed it was a response to the rape of a Muslim woman by a
Coptic Christian man in a nearby village (Hamzawy, 2010; Amer, 2010). The holiday season also provided stories of Sufi Muslims celebrating the Sufi New Year and Shia Muslims celebrating Ashura. Since Egypt is a majority Sunni Muslim country, this discussion causes discourse on the differences between Sunni and minority Muslim culture (Syed, 2010). So while negative events occurred, none were clearly Muslim in origin which allows for a more nuanced examination of coverage of Islam.

In Poole’s study, she used the search terms “Islam” and “Muslim” as her sole method for finding articles on Muslims in the British press. Since this study looks at Islam in a Muslim-majority context it seemed reasonable to expect that some discussion of topics related to Islam might not have these headings. In a Muslim-majority context, Islam could be an “understood.” To help adjust for this, several terms were added, based on the types of stories this researcher saw during initial searches. Specific terms from the Islamic faith were added: “Ramadan,” “Fatwa,” and “Ijtihad.” But it was also important to make sure the study captured conflicts with differing belief groups of Islam. As John Esposito notes succinctly: “Although Muslims maintain that there is one divinely revealed and mandated Islam, there are many Muslim interpretations of Islam’ (Esposito, 2002: 2). So the study included the search terms “Shia,” “Shiite” (an alternate spelling), and “Sunni.” “Shiite” didn’t appear as often in Egyptian publications as it does in American publications, but some articles did use the phrase in describing Shia Muslims in other countries. Articles related to the Muslim Brotherhood would be uncovered in the “Muslim” search term. To capture conflicts between Muslims and Copts, the study included “Coptic.” And finally to make sure a sample of cultural issues was included, the
study included “hijab,” a female Muslim garb that is often a subject of religious debate over gender issues. During this time frame there was some debate over Muslim garb, including the “niqab”—a more modest covering than the “hijab.”

Once again, these terms were added based on the types of stories this researcher saw where Islam may be an “understood.” But a possible limitation of this study, as will be discussed in the conclusion, is that some of these terms, in this specific time period, may have shown more discourse on religious minorities than generally occurs in Egyptian English press. Most interviewed journalists generally thought religious minorities did not get much coverage, but the time period chosen actually resulted in a surprising amount of coverage.

There was such an excess of articles that it would be impossible in the time frame available for the study to read everyone of them as Poole did in her study (Poole, 2006). So this study captured every tenth article, in order of its appearance in the search, and placed it in a database that included the article title, publication date, publication, a permalink to its online location and the story itself. As a result of the sheer number of articles available, only every twentieth article was examined for the content analysis.

There were numerous search result entries removed during the selection process and it’s worth noting what was exempted and why it was exempted. First, duplicates were removed. If a search entry duplicate was found, it was deleted and the next original article selected. Second, both Al-Masry Al-Youm and Daily News Egypt made use of international wire services in their newspapers/websites. Often these search entries were unmarked unless the article was examined. Articles from Reuters, AFP, AP and Agencies
were all excluded, as they are not representative of the work of Egyptian journalists. Third, some search entries included, in the case of *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, pictures and their captions. And while the information was in some cases interesting, it is beyond the scope of this study. Fourth, search entries occasionally contained, in the case of *Al Ahram Weekly*, parent pages to the material (ie. an issue’s “Front Page” or “Features Page”) and those entries were also excluded as it was duplicated material. And finally, there are a number of people in Egypt named “Islam,” “Muslim,” and “Ramadan”—even one “Islam Muslim.” As these were stories about people that didn’t relate to the subject matter at hand, they were also deleted.

Opinion articles were allowed to stay in the study. In the American press, it is taken for granted that news is not broken in an opinion article (Rosen, 1999; Rosenstiel, 2001). But with the understanding that news values differ in the Egyptian press, it seemed reasonable to keep them in the study (Mellor, 2005). Their presence was more pronounced in *Al Ahram Weekly* than in other publications, perhaps because *Al Ahram Weekly’s* publication cycle makes it a more obvious source for commentary than breaking news.

Presence and absence coding, which was done in a similar manner to Poole’s study, was collected in Excel (Poole, 2002). It was then uploaded into SPSS statistical analysis software to output graphs and charts to help visualize the frequency of the themes. For a full list of the themes, please the raw data on page 73-74.

Of the themes used in the presence and absence coding, most were taken from the framework provided in Poole’s study *Reporting Islam*, but this researcher added an
additional term “terrorism” in recognition that Poole’s study was pre-9-11, that her subsequent studies included the term, and in response to the number of mentioned that occurred (Poole, 2002). Terms removed because of their centrality to events in Britain included: “Rushdie,” “Prince Charles,” “Muslim Parliament,” “Nation of Islam,” Islamic committees and the “Bradford riots.”

Also, “anti-racism” was removed in appreciation that the term, in Poole’s study referred to articles that argued it was wrong to discriminate against Muslims on ethnic or religious bases (Poole, 2002). Racism against Muslims is obviously not a very common subject in the Egyptian press. Anti-racism might only occur in conversations about Coptic Christians, but other terms were used to identify articles referring to Coptics.

“‘Normal’ news stories” was removed because its context in Britain was coverage of Muslims in which they were treated like any other group—this was obviously the norm in the Egyptian press. “Relations to other religions” was removed simply to avoid duplication—the majority of articles that discuss Islam in relation to another group, typically describe Christianity. One might suspect that Judaism might appear because of Egypt’s proximity and relationship with Israel, but on the contrary, stories relating to Israel are primarily political and governmental. And since “Relations to Christianity” already appears, “Relations to other religions” was removed. Also “Relationships” was also removed simply because the word was too broad for use in an Egyptian context.

Since Muslims include about 90 percent of Egyptians, most characters in the articles have one relationship or another. In a British context, the word was more useful in pin-pointing
the relationships between Muslims and the way they were excluded from mainstream conversation.

And finally there were two themes that were altered slightly to be of more use for the specific context. “Relations with host community” was changed to “Relations with Muslim-majority community” to pick up stories referring to Muslim Brotherhood, Selefi, Shia and Coptic Christian relations with the Muslim majority culture. There was never a description of Egyptians as “hosts” to Coptics, Muslim Brotherhood, etc. And “Ethnic Minorities” was reinterpreted as “Religious Minorities.” In Poole’s studies, discussing the Arab minority was often another way to discuss Muslims (Poole, 2002). But in Egypt it was more useful to point out press discussions of religious minorities including the Coptics, Shia, Selefi and Ba’hais. The minority cultures most key to this study are religious, not ethnic because this study focuses on the coverage of the religious as opposed to the ethnic.

Other than the differences noted above, the presence and absence coding of this study followed the basic pattern of Poole’s. But it should be recognized that this sort of quantitative analysis does have its limitations:

Quantitative content analyses tend to be purely descriptive accounts of the characteristics of media output and often make few inferences in advance about the potential significance of their findings in the context of what they reveal about production ideologies or impact of media content on audiences…A further limitation of quantitative content analysis is that it is assumed that definite meanings can be assigned within the coding process (Gunter, 2000: 81-82).
Indeed, Krippendorff’s emphasis on the reproducibility of a quantitative content analysis assumes that textual meaning is both fixed and quantifiable (Gunter, 2000; Krippendorff, 2004). It’s also difficult to know what influence, if any this framing has on other journalists and/or the community (Van Gorp, 2010).

**Interviews**

This part of the study provides journalists’ personal perspectives on how the coverage of Islam in English publications is being done. The interviews provide an additional source of data to help explain the nature of the coverage of Islam in English-language publications. So this study conducted a number of interviews with journalists at influential Egyptian news outlets via email or Skype, an online video calling system that allows for the transmission of audio and video. One journalist was interviewed in-person while on assignment in Washington, D.C. Three journalists were interviewed via Skype and the last four were interviewed via email. Granted, more information was gathered from the in-person and Skype interviews, but some newsrooms had policies that forbid internet audio/video communications. And I found that, for the most part, journalists provided focused, detailed answers in their email. Obviously, email interviews provided less information, but key information was gathered nonetheless. Ideally, in future research, all interviews would be done by Skype or in-person.

The interview in-person was recorded with a digital recorder and the Skype interviews were recorded with Skype Call Recorder, which captured the video and audio
from the conversation. The in-person interview and Skype interviews were transcribed and analyzed at a later time.

The goal of this part of the study was to secure more than five interviews via the snowball method—connecting with existing sources to find new sources. In other studies examining sociological issues of the news in the journal Arab Media & Society, researchers typically had about five interviews with industry professionals (Field and Hamam, 2009; Gräf, 2008; Pejman, 2009; Lynch, 2007). Some journalists worked only in traditional print, while other worked with integrated print/web job descriptions. All journalists interviewed in this study worked in English-language publications in Egypt and included both state-run and independent media professionals. This allowed for comment both from those who perform state-run coverage and from those who challenge government media’s traditional hold on information. Organizations where journalists were interviewed include: Daily News Egypt, Al-Masry Al-Youm, Business Today, Egypt Today, The Egyptian Gazette, IslamOnline.Net and Muslim Media Watch.

The method for these interviews was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Georgetown University. In order to perform interviews, I was required to have journalists sign a consent form. Some questions were prepared beforehand (see Appendix A). All of them were meant to be open-ended and allow the journalist to provide the basic sense of how Islam is covered. It was made clear, because of the sensitive nature of the subject, that if a journalist felt uncomfortable answering a given question he or she could respond “no comment.” Questions included, but were not limited to: “In what kind of stories does the Islamic faith primarily arise? Events? Government? Person profiles?”;

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“What is the process for writing stories concerning Islam? Is the writing/editing process any different from the writing of a typical story?”; and “What’s the hardest story you’ve had to cover concerning Islam? What made it difficult?” Interviews over Skype and in-person typically ranged from 45 minutes to an hour-and-a-half.

Information gathered from both the content analysis and interviews proved vital toward answering how Islam is covered in Egyptian English-language publications. Chapter three will describe the findings from the two study methods.
CHAPTER THREE: STUDY FINDINGS

Getting a glimpse at how Islam is covered in English-language news publications in Egypt is a key starting point to investigating how Islam is covered in a Muslim-majority context. All previous research has looked at how Islam is covered in a Western and/or Muslim-minority context. This research is important not only to fill in a key research gap but also to help reporters covering Islam in Muslim-minority country to get a sense of how it’s covered in a different context.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study had two primary methods: a content analysis of three key Egyptian English publications—Al-Masry Al-Youm, Daily News Egypt, and Al Ahram Weekly—and interviews with Egyptian news media professionals.

News Framing Analysis

Some of the results were anticipated, while others were more surprising. In addition to marking for presence and absence in the themes presented, this researcher also took notes and key quotations from some of the more interesting articles.

Eighty-six total articles were surveyed from Daily News Egypt, Al Ahram Weekly and Al-Masry Al-Youm between October 29, 2009 and February 1, 2010. And the search terms mentioned in the methods section revealed articles that all concerned Islam in some way, whether subtly or blatantly. The charts (pages 73-74) provide the raw numbers from this content analysis. As noted in the methods chapter, the themes are coded just for presence or absence. So if a given theme appears at a frequency of 60, then it appeared in
60 articles. This is also the case in the graphs (pages 54, 59), which compare the themes side-by-side.

And so it’s interesting that the themes of “government” and “politics” appeared so often. Government appeared in 63 of the 86 articles—73.25 percent of articles that involve Islam also have some sort interest in the government. Similarly 38 of the 86 articles that involve Islam—44 percent—also have a theme of politics involved in some way. As some of the interviews will indicate, this may be an indication of the Egyptian news industry’s interest in political Islam.

The above graph shows the appearance of different elements of religion, and religious minorities in coverage of Islam. Frequency denotes the individual number of articles in which the theme appeared. Fig. 1
As Rugh noted, often news media takes the shape of the government in which it operates (Rugh, 2004). Or perhaps the media simply responds to concerns raised by the government. In the *Al-Masry Al-Youm* article “Rights groups call Egypt ‘police state,’” a human rights group argues that the government practices systematic discrimination against Coptic Christians, Quranists, Shia and Ba’hais (Halim, 2009). This expresses some of the concerns that people in Egypt have. Multiple journalists expressed that they felt they had some freedom in reporting on Islam compared to reporting on politics (Interview 7; Interview 5).

In terms of actual discussion of the Islamic religion, 18 articles discuss “belief,” three articles discuss a “Crisis of faith,” and four articles discuss “conversion.” *Daily News Egypt* published an interesting commentary, in the wake of the Naga Hammedi shooting, about what the Quran actually states about relations to Christians and Jews. It openly explores whether the Quran is hostile to Christians and Jews—the piece concludes that the Quran is not hostile if read in the context in which it was written:

> Moreover, verses considered hostile to Jews and Christians must be read in context: at the time that some of them were recorded, for example, a Jewish tribe allied to the Muslims had betrayed them. Naturally, Muslims were warned against seeking protectors or allies among other communities But should instructions in the Quran relating to such specific incidents be generalized to apply to the relationship between Muslims, Christians and Jews today? (El-Ali, 2009)

In terms of discussions about Coptics, “Relations with Christianity” included 33 articles. It should be noted that there was a larger amount of coverage of relations with
Christianity in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* than in either *Daily News Egypt* or in *Al Ahram Weekly*. In *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, “The Alienation of Christians” was an interesting article on the subject of Coptic/Muslim discourse. It’s interesting in that the Coptic Christians here are “extremists.” Many articles that talk about “extreme” or “fundamentalist” religions are referring to Christianity. The theme of “fundamentalism” comes up in some conflicts with Coptics, who are described as radical and extremist in *Al-Masry Al-Youm’s “Swiss president warned of conspiracy to deport Muslims”* (el-Hofy, 2009). The article argues that if Coptics want to have better relations/standing in Egypt, they need to make meaningful contributions to Egyptian society.

Interestingly enough this content analysis located almost no coverage in *Al Ahram Weekly* of the Nag Hammadi shooting, which was a key moment of violence between Coptics and Muslims. This is significant because the state-run *Al Ahram* is considered the paper of record in Egypt. This could represent a difference between the Arabic and English language paper, a willful dismissal of the subject as newsworthy, or a side-effect of the sensitivity of the topic. In this research only one article was found on the subject in *Al Ahram Weekly*. And this fits in with the larger trend that less coverage affecting the theme “Relations with Christianity” is present in *Al Ahram Weekly* than in *Daily News Egypt*—if only by a little—or *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. *Al Ahram Weekly*’s articles do include an article that attempts to explain the nature of some of the conflict—“The Coptic Question.”

Four decades of religious tension have precipitated many problems. Their combined result has been to demote citizenship in favour of religious affiliation.
Egyptian society has been re-categorised on a religious basis, and public and political spaces have become an almost entirely religious sphere... When, in the 1970s, the president declared that he was a Muslim president of an Islamic state, it immediately begged questions as to the status of non-Muslims. In the ensuing debate there was considerable discussion of the position of Copts in Islamic jurisprudence, and the term *ahl al-zimma* (non-Muslim subject peoples) was frequently used. It is from this point that we can date the increasing encroachment of religion into politics, the steady sanctification of the public space and a re-categorisation of society on the basis of religious affiliation. Subsequently, Egypt has experienced almost continuous sectarian tension, from the Akhmim incident in 1970 to the present day (Morqos, 2010).

Since the Nag Hammadi shooting became a central event in the discussion of Islam during this time frame, perhaps it’s worthwhile to note what happened at the incident by a news organization that covered the incident. *Al-Masry Al-Youm* described the shooting that occurred on Coptic Christmas Eve, January 6, 2010:

“At 11:15 p.m., a group of deacons and I were leaving the church when we saw a Fiat with three men carrying guns who started shooting at us,” Kirollos told *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. “The deacons pushed me back at the church while six of them were gunned downed with a Muslim security guard,” he added. The bishop expressed his astonishment at the security’s failure to protect the church despite previous threats. “Security forces were completely absent from the scene,” he explained. The bishop said he had an idea of who the attackers were, calling them "Muslim radicals."
"It is all religious now. This is a religious war about how they can finish off the Christians in Egypt," he said (Amer, 2010).

In one of the expected results, there was a heavy emphasis on “World Affairs” in the sample—50 articles. Now in part this may be an indication of the audience, primarily elite Egyptians and foreigners, and in part this may be an indication of Doha Debates’ theory that it’s easier to cover a neighboring country than one’s own (Doha Debates, 2006). There were also 21 articles that discussed East/West relations and usually these centered on relations with Britain or the United States. There were 12 articles that appeared as Anti-Western, but here it’s key to note that most of them (10) were from Al Ahram Weekly. No such article appeared in Daily News Egypt and only two appeared in Al-Masry Al-Youm. “Being Muslim in the Wrong Time in America” is a representative piece in that much Al Ahram Weekly coverage surveyed was opinionated with little attribution or supporting facts:

Post 9/11, America has declared war on Islam with the FBI in the lead at home. It notoriously targets the vulnerable, entraps them with paid informants, inflates bogus charges, spreads them maliciously through the media, then intimidates juries to convict and sentence innocent men and some women to long prison terms. Justice is nearly always denied. At times willful killings are committed (Lendman, 2009).

Another interesting trend was the number of articles relating to violence. For the term “terrorism,” events like the Nag Hammadi shooting were removed. They were, really, “terrifying” events but the shooting seemed like it would have skewed the numbers. “Terrorism” instead reflects references to terrorist organizations who perform
terrorist activities—such as Hamas, Al Qaeda, Hizbollah. Terrorism appeared in 23 articles, and here the vast majority of them appeared (11 articles) in the state-run *Al Ahram Weekly*. That was far more than this researcher had expected, judging from the criticisms of terrorism coverage in the West. This could perhaps speak to shared concern about terrorists who consider themselves “Islamic” or, could be representative of the audience to whom they’re writing. But higher numbers included “Criminal Activity” at 30 articles and “Unrest” and 29 articles. Many of the articles about “Unrest” referred to riots that occurred in response to the trial of a Coptic man who raped a Muslim woman and the Nag Hammadi shooting that followed.

The above graph shows the appearance of government, international politics, crime, and culture in articles concerning Islam. Frequency denotes the individual number of articles in which the theme appeared. Fig. 2
Finally, it’s worth noting that in almost half of the articles mentioned, 42 of 86, allude in some way to “Conflicts between Muslims.” This can be anything from conflict over theology to disagreements over tangible issues. But in all cases it’s made clear that the players in question are Muslim. Perhaps the main lesson here is that Islam is not seen monolithically in Egypt, but is as different as each person’s interpretation of the religion. Many of the trends that appeared in the content analysis will reappear in the next section on the interviews performed.

**Interviews**

During the course of the study, eight Egyptian journalists and bloggers were interviewed. Those interviewed include bloggers, journalists and editors at *IslamOnline.net, Muslim Media Watch, Daily News Egypt, Egypt Today, Business Today*, the *Egyptian Gazette* and *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. All of these news organizations are either English and Arabic or English-only. Due to the sensitivity of the study, all personalities at these organizations spoke on the condition of anonymity. All subjects asked to be described as “a journalist based in Cairo,” “an Egyptian journalist” or a similar phrasing. Three of the interviews were done over Skype, an internet-based video calling system, one was done in person with a journalist on assignment in Washington, D.C. and the remaining four were done via email. Email interviews obviously resulted in shorter answers to the questions raised, but in the study, subjects were also more focused on providing concise, accurate responses over email. The in-person and Skype interviews typically lasted from 45 minutes to an hour.
The key to these interviews, as with the content analysis, was to get a sense of how Islam is covered in English-language publications in Egypt. Several themes arose in response to this during the interviews—and many of the findings are reinforced by the quantitative content analysis findings. For each theme, the findings on the subject will be summarized, followed by a few quotes to that regard. These quotes included are not edited for grammar or cohesion to be true to the information. Bracketed information is only used to provide context for the quoted material.

(1) Islam is covered mainly in relation to culture and politics—journalists stressed that there is no need for an “Islam beat” in Egypt, because Islam is everywhere. One journalist said that Egyptian journalists don’t see their work as “religion” stories because religion is so intertwined with culture and politics (Interview 8). Journalists noted that almost every story in Egypt can relate in some way to Islam—anything related to politics and culture will in some way tie into Islam (Interview 3; Interview 7). One journalist, a non-Muslim, noted that it was interesting that often in politics, Islam is used as a tool. The rhetoric of Islam is very popular with the people and by using it a politician can gain traction even if there is little genuine behind it. Journalists noted that Islam especially appears in stories about the Muslim Brotherhood—a political Islam organization in Egypt, and in stories about “sectarian strife”—strife between two peoples of competing ideologies. In Egypt, “sectarian strife” is typically code for conflict between Coptic Christians and Sunni Muslims. Islam is covered as a part of everything in society. It is in
the background, it is in the contemporary issues, and it is in the quotes provided by sources.

“I don’t cover Islamic issues proper. But by nature of living in a place like Egypt where Islam is extremely omnipresent in many facets of life, it comes up in many stories. Whether directly or indirectly… Islam is all over the place. You could be doing a woman’s story and end up calling a religious authority to comment. Which was the case with me … when I wrote about women protesting that they cannot become judges at the state council so one of the things I did was called up a shah and asked, ‘Is there anything in Islam that explicitly says women cannot be judges?’ I took his voice on that” (Interview 3).

“Islam is the state religion in Egypt and the majority of the population are Muslims and it is engraved, not only in our religious practices, but in our cultural traditions as well, therefore in most of the stories, whether its political or human rights or society, it is guaranteed that one of the sources I interview will bring up Islam’s view on the issue. Even if the person may be a secular, he will include Islam’s view as a way to convince the public with whatever the cause is he is advocating” (Interview 2).

“There’s a big difference between Islam and what Egyptians practice because we don’t have one Islam, we have many Islams. So when I try to report on things related to Islam as a religion, I have to bring it into the ground to see how people practice. For example, when working as an arts and culture editor and you have...
to make an article about fashion and Islam. I can show the Islamic perspective about fashion. How the woman should dress. But when I bring it into the street, you can find maybe the opposite. And from there you can maybe do a story about how Islam says and how people and their lifestyles comprehend their views” (Interview 1).

This journalist noted that one of the key ways that Islam becomes a part of the story is in the sourcing. If the source is outspoken about his faith, it would be journalistically inaccurate to not include it as part of the story. And it is a part of the story for many people in Egypt.

(2) **Islam is covered with great sensitivity on the part of the journalist**—perhaps part of the reason journalists continue to cover the political/cultural aspects of Islam is a result of the sensitive nature of covering the actual religion. One journalist noted that in a typical local newspaper in Egypt, there will be page after page of political and cultural content that relates to Islam in someway. But the actual “religion” page is often just a single page. Some journalists said they felt intimidated by writing stories on Islam, others said they avoided stories on Islam, and still others recounted stories of tense occasions that followed when they did cover the story. And it’s worth noting that almost every journalist said they were completely comfortable covering stories that related to Islam—which may also indicate their adeptness at covering a subject that is a part of their culture and politics—but many also could quickly summon stories that were especially difficult (Interview 5; Interview 6; Interview 8). Below, Interview 3 discusses sectarian strife which is sensitive not only to Muslims but Copts as well.
“Thankfully, I try to run away from any stories concerning Islam. I feel that people won't be as objective when they see me or they won't believe that I'm an objective person because I wear the veil. As a result, I usually try to go for the more political stories or features, something that's a bit more light-hearted… [On more controversial stories, potential sources] will usually refuse to get quoted or be included in your article. They don't want to be looked down on or considered odd. As I had mentioned before, Islam is a very sensitive issue in Egypt. You have opposite ends of the spectrum and very few people in the gray area in the middle.”

“When writing a story about Islam, at least from what I've seen in Egypt, you have to be a thousand percent sure of what's being written because there's a lot of sensitivity and even the slightest word choice can have a completely different meaning and create problems. Also, in comparing it to any other story, there's usually a light side to any feature or hard news story no matter what the topic is. That's not the case, though, with writing stories that pertain to religion—just because people can misunderstand anything to turning it into a joke instead of a hard news piece” (Interview 5).

“When I was covering a story about a Dutch historian and anthropologist, who was a former ambassador here. He wrote an English book about religious festivals in Egypt. But, some Christian guest speaker in the event told the audience that he did not believe in religion or the benefit it has for the Egyptian people, who should believe in science and technology rather than wasting their time in visiting these Islamic or Coptic festivals. Upon his own request, I deleted
his remark from the story because he did not want it to appear in any Egyptian paper” (Interview 4).

“I’m not a big fan of covering sectarian strife stories because it’s extremely stifling to be honest. I take it a bit personally....My experience is that, at the beginning of my career, I used to be a little bit inhibited by doing stories that have an Islamic dimension because I’m not a Muslim myself...There was the inhibition of being in a place like Egypt where issues concerning Islam can be a little bit sensitive and you as a non-Muslim can be condemned as being the wrong person to do stories like this.”

“[Islam is a sensitive topic] but it’s also very sexy. It’s the story that will sell very well both locally and internationally. It’s the story that would draw people’s attention to your name. It has always been the high ground, covering stories that have Islam in the background (Interview 3).

“I tried to post an article about why Muslims don’t go to churches...It’s like we open our mosques for everybody who can visit, why stop going to the church like it’s a forbidden place? However it’s not...It got a very negative response. It’s like people did not understand it. It’s like no, we don’t go to the church, we go to the mosque” (Interview 1).

It should also be noted that all of the journalists spoken to stressed the importance of being “objective” and quoting sources with whom they disagree. That stance caused some of those journalists a considerable amount of hate mail. One journalist noted that if one quotes a source, and allows them a forum for discourse, this indicates agreement with
the source. The journalists noted a story on Ba’hais she wrote and quoted Ba’hais. She said she got angry mail that accused her of being a heretic (Interview 8).

With that in mind, journalists who refuse to quote sources that disagree with Egypt’s Muslim-majority culture may be more positively viewed by society.

(3) **English-language journalists feel they have some leeway in reporting on Islam**—this study can make no claims as to how Arabic-language publications compare to English-language publications in coverage of Islam, but many journalists said they saw a distinct difference. When asked about the attitude toward covering Islam at their publication, several responded by claiming that they had “more” freedom than if they were at an Arabic-language publication. The differentiations made perhaps say less about Arabic-language publications and more about how English-language journalists view their occupation and their coverage. Journalists spoke about their desire to cover Islam “fairly” and objectively.

“We cover stories concerning human rights in all its forms, whether in terms of religion, freedom of expression, etc. I can’t think of anything to be done differently simply because I have never felt I was pressured into covering a story in a certain way. In almost two years working at [this publication], not once did an editor come up to me and told me not to cover this or took out parts of a story I’ve sent, I consider this a ‘blessing’ given the fact that I’m a journalist in Egypt…The fact that the majority of Egyptians don’t speak English makes the authorities let a lot of things we cover pass. But I can imagine that they are more attentive to Arab media and the content published or broadcasted there. On the
other hand, being an English newspaper, even though we can reach only a small portion of the society, we reach the decision makers, those who can make a difference after reading an article in our newspaper, which is a great advantage we have” (Interview 2).

“[Our publication] handles stories dealing with the Islamic faith objectively whenever necessity arises. We write our stories in a balanced way that expresses the views of moderates and extremists.”

“In the English-language media, the target audience is different from the readers of Arabic-language newspapers and magazines. Usually, an Egyptian writer, who speaks and writes in English, like myself, is a defendant of moderate Islam and a proponent of inter-faith dialogue and communication with the Other” (Interview 4).

“The journalistic practice is drastically different between the Arabic-speaking media and the English-speaking media…I would love someday to work for a healthy Arabic-speaking media environment, but the problem is the lack of accuracy, too much personalization of issues, so when it comes to Islam it becomes more so of a case…all of those are problems and it makes me feel more comfortable in the more contained environment of English-speaking media. So the idea would be to combine the engagement and the sense of understanding local journalists have with Islam as faith and as a culture also with the accuracy and the objectivity that the international media has also taught us” (Interview 3).
Journalists overwhelmingly felt that they had a degree of freedom because the majority of the Egyptian population doesn’t read English. So by reporting in English, they’re able to get away with being a bit more objective and citing sources that would more often cause a ruckus.

(4) Journalists are keenly aware of concerns, in both Egypt and abroad, of Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists operating in the name of Islam—Journalists oftentimes noted their dissatisfaction with the international press which, at times, stereotypes them as extremists or terrorists. Yet nearly a quarter of the articles surveyed still allude to terrorism in some way when discussing Islam (see page 74). Journalists were resistant about the typecast role that Western media often provides; yet many also seemed to want to answer for things done in the name of Islam. Interestingly, in all interviews, there was no question posed about terrorism and Islam. This could perhaps be a response to the overwhelming Western study of Islam and terrorism—perhaps thinking that was this researcher’s primary objective. Yet many respondents chose to allude to it.

“I think that the topic of Islam has a lot of aspects to it, just like that of any other religion. There's the good and the bad. Of course depending on your media source is how this topic will be covered. I think that journalists in Egypt should work a lot harder on how Islam is perceived in the west. We have the tools and the language to help support, it's just a matter of putting those two things together to make sure we have an objective story with an edge or angle to it.”
“Islam is a hot topic around the world, especially after 9/11 and a lot of people are still trying to grasp it and get their hands around it and to understand what it means and what it's all about and these are all things that we - as journalists on this side of the world - should take advantage of” (Interview 5).

“I think in Egypt, the media don’t report on Islam unless it talks about the plight of Muslims. So we have the same situation as in the Western media. What bleeds, it ledes. Or maybe it’s that the bad news is what the media is searching for” (Interview 1).

(5) Many concerns about the coverage of Islam are rooted in perceived societal problems. One journalist noted that if Egyptian society cared more about religious minorities, they would probably receive more coverage (Interview 8). One journalist wanted to do a story on the Shi’a population in Egypt but she’d never met a Shi’a in her entire life in Egypt. They do represent a small minority in Egyptian society, yet she struggled with whether she’d really never met a Shi’a or whether she’d never met a Shi’a willing to describe themselves as Shi’a (Interview 1). Another journalist in a similar situation was able to find a story about an imprisoned Shi’a but the problem came when she tried to find the story’s parajournalists—the sources, the public relations officials, and the spokespeople. The problem was that she couldn’t find an organization that spoke for the Shi’a people. It took her some time, but she eventually did find one.

“The problem we face in Egypt is that we don’t care about minorities” (Interview 8).
“Meaning that usually the stories regarding religious minorities tend to be about discrimination of some sort. Sunni Islam being the majority faith in Egypt, there wont be any stories of that nature unless it involves sectarian violence, where there can be attacks from both sides” (Interview 6).

“Whenever I cover a hard or soft news story about the members of the Jewish, Christian, or Ba’hai Egyptians, I do not handle the story like whenever I deal with story about the Sunni or Shi'ite Muslims” (Interview 4).

Journalists noted that Egyptian society can be discriminatory toward religious minorities—ie. Coptic Christians face many legal obstacles to build churches, and anti-Semitic materials are sold openly. Although journalists can be exceptionally sensitive to their concerns as a human rights issue, a journalists’ concern means little without the readers’ (Interview 1; Interview 7; Interview 8). The content analysis indicated that “Religious Minorities” do receive quite a bit of coverage, but the interviews seemed to indicate that this was by virtue of the time period and the audience of English-language press more than representative of Egyptian press.

(6) The Disaggregated Data show substantial differences between coverage in the state-run Al Ahram Weekly and the independents Al-Masry Al Youm and Daily News Egypt. This final finding is based out of the data from the content analysis (pages 73-74). This is a finding which could have been anticipated, but is worth noting nonetheless. Al Ahram Weekly’s coverage in this study is far different than that of the two independent
new organizations in this study. This is most apparent in five key themes. In *Al Ahram Weekly*, the “Anti-Western” theme appeared in 10 articles as opposed to two in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and none in *Daily News Egypt*. “Criminal Activity” appeared substantially less in *Al Ahram Weekly* (seven articles) as opposed to *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (12 articles) and *Daily News Egypt* (11 articles). The theme of “East/West Relations” appeared in 12 articles in *Al Ahram Weekly* as opposed to smaller numbers in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (five articles) and *Daily News Egypt* (four articles). The theme of “Government” appeared slightly less in *Al Ahram Weekly* (18 articles) than in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (21 articles) and *Daily News Egypt* (24 articles). And finally, the theme of “Terrorism” appeared substantially more in *Al Ahram Weekly* (11 articles) than in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (five articles) and *Daily News Egypt* (seven articles).

There are a couple of possible reasons for the difference in coverage. First, and as previously noted, *Al Ahram Weekly* is a state-run institution as opposed to an independent institution. If the idea behind English-language press is to reach elites and foreigners, then *Al Ahram Weekly* may be seen largely as an outward-facing media outlet—portraying Egypt the way the state wants it to be portrayed. But also, *Al Ahram Weekly* is the only one of three English-language institutions that is printed—the online component is secondary. But for *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and *Daily News Egypt*, the online component is primary. This could also speak to a difference of medium and the audience expectancy from that medium.

In conclusion, this study has performed a content analysis of three English-language Egyptian publications, including *Daily News Egypt, Al-Masry Al-Youm* and *Al
Ahram Weekly. And this researcher also performed interviews with eight key bloggers, journalists and editors at differing English-language news organizations. This study found that Islam is covered mainly in relation to culture and politics, Islam is covered with great sensitivity on the part of the journalist, English-language journalists feel they have some leeway in reporting on Islam, concerns about Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists claiming to be Islamic are still key in English-language Egyptian publications, many concerns about coverage of Islam are rooted in perceived societal problems, and finally that there are substantial differences between coverage in the state-run press and the independent press.
CONCLUSION

News media in Egypt don’t fit into a mold. Different news organizations respond differently to the set of contradictions that is Egyptian society. The preceding chapters are a brief glimpse into the world that is the Egyptian news media industry. The goal of this study was to better understand how Islam is covered in Egyptian English-language publications. The hypothesis that coverage would likely be nuanced held true. The content analysis showed a high percentage of articles on Islam that discussed “Conflicts between Muslims” or discussed “Religious Minorities.” This indicates an understanding that Islam is not a monolith but as multifaceted as each person on the streets of Cairo.

This study also found that Islam is covered mainly in relation to culture and politics. Of 86 articles surveyed, 63 also discussed “Government” and 38 discussed “Politics.” As journalists noted in interviews, there’s no need for an “Islam” beat in Egypt, because Islam is in nearly every story. It is rooted in the politics of the country, the rhetoric of its public officials and the culture of its people. One journalist noted that one is culturally Muslim “simply by virtue of living in Egypt” (Interview 3).

And so it makes sense that concerns about coverage of Islam are rooted less in journalistic practice than in societal problems. As noted earlier, one journalist mentioned that she wanted to do a story on the Shi’a population in Egypt. The problem? She’s never met a Shi’a in her entire life in Egypt. There’s no doubt that they are a small percentage of Egyptian society, yet she struggled with whether she’d really never met a Shi’a or whether she’d just never met a Shi’a willing to describe themselves as “Shi’a” (Interview 1). Another journalist noted that in Egyptian society, “we don’t care about minorities”.
(Interview 8). If readers cared more about minorities, would the news coverage reflect that?

But Islam is covered with great sensitivity on the part of journalists. Islam appears in so many topics that it’s perhaps impossible that journalists would not become comfortable with the topic. In numerous instances, journalists discussed the obstacles they faced in order to cover a story fairly and accurately. But they also indicated that English-language journalists have some leeway in reporting on Islam by virtue of having a small, educated and elite readership. Journalists are keenly aware of concerns, in both Egypt and abroad, of Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists operating in the name of Islam. And this leaves us with questions: does the repeated theme of “terrorism” reflect the audience catered to or a shared concern? Many of the problems journalists cite in coverage of Islam are rooted in perceived societal problems. Finally, there are substantial differences between coverage in the state-run press and the independent press.

**Rugh’s Typology Revisited**

Since Rugh is so central to the study of Arab media, it’s worth revisiting his typology to contemplate where the English-language press in Egypt fits.

When Rugh originally wrote *The Arab Press*, he placed Egypt in the category of a “Mobilization Press.” He described the press system at the time as a press that “does not criticize the basic policies of the national government. The government’s foreign policies are particularly unassailable, but the major lines of domestic policy, too are never attacked” (Rugh, 1979: 31). But when he reworked his study in the early-2000s, he
labeled Egypt as a “Transitional Press,” which he described as a "mixed system in which the largest circulation print media are controlled directly by the government but smaller ones are owned by private individuals or parties, and they have some latitude to criticize those in power" (Rugh, 2004: 252). In this press system, the government does try to restrict newsrooms at times, but it uses the courts and relies on journalists' self-censorship.

The problem here is less a problem with Rugh than with typologies themselves—they’re a good way of organizing information but can be restrictive in allowing a full picture of the depth and complexity of a given media entity. In terms of the English-language press, this study does in many ways affirm Rugh’s categorization of Egypt as “Transitional Press.” The largest press studied in this research is *Al Ahram Weekly* and it is government controlled—and the type of coverage in *Al Ahram Weekly* was shown to be substantially different than that in other news entities, which were able to do more critical publishing. And in that way, this study fits in nicely with Rugh’s typology. But the press system in Egypt is as different as each news organization. There is clearly a difference between *Al Ahram Weekly* and the other news organizations surveyed, but even between *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and *Daily News Egypt* there are fundamental differences in audience and infrastructure that are lost with labeling the system, as a whole, as “transitional” (see Chapter two). The press system of Egypt is constantly evolving. Any general description of a press system in Egypt, even one as astute as Rugh’s, would likely be outdated as soon as it was published. While the typology is an ineffective road map, it serves as a very effective compass, especially for a project such as this.
Review of the Study

This project was organized into three chapters. Chapter one reviews the relevant literature on Arab media, Islam in Egypt and coverage of Islam. Much Arab media literature stresses the importance of focusing on particular areas because the Arab press system is so multifaceted and so distinct in different countries. For instance, Rugh would argue that coverage of Islam in Lebanon is far different from that performed in Saudi Arabia (Rugh, 2004). Yet much of the existing English literature on the Arab press looks more broadly at the Arab mediascape. This study attempted to understand the nature of press coverage on Islam by focusing on a particular country and a particular medium. Islam is a rich topic for discussion in an Egyptian context. Egypt is the birthplace of the Islamic Modernist movement, which sought to bring Western institutions—including the newsroom—into Islam. It is also the birthplace of the Muslim Brotherhood, a powerful political Islam sect whose slogan explains much of their approach—“Islam is the solution.” There is little English literature that looks at Egypt’s rich media tradition. Most research focuses on how the West covers Islam—usually badly—although some recent studies have been released on coverage of Islam in Australia and India. But no English study has been performed that attempts to see how Islam is covered by local media in a Muslim-majority context like Egypt.

Chapter two discussed the study’s methodology. Two different research methods were employed. Content analysis was employed to look at the product produced by Egyptian English-language media. Key in this portion was to avoid looking at coverage
by international organizations such as the Associated Press, Agence France Press and Reuters, but instead focus on coverage done by journalists who live in Egypt and work with media based in Egypt. It examined 86 total articles under search terms related to “Islam” at Daily News Egypt, Al-Masry Al-Youm and Al Ahram Weekly. The three news sources are very different, but that added to the richness of the study. Daily News Egypt is the only daily English-only news source in Egypt. Al-Masry Al-Youm is a young news organization that shares content between both and Arabic and English edition. And Al Ahram Weekly is the weekly English edition of the Middle East’s highest circulation newspaper—Al Ahram. In order to gather the 86 articles collected, search terms, detailed in chapter two, were used to gather individual articles relating to Islam. And every twentieth article was used for the study.

In addition, interviews were performed with eight journalists from English-language publications that included Egypt Today, Al-Masry Al-Youm, Business Today, Muslim Media Watch, IslamOnline.net, Daily News Egypt and the Egyptian Gazette. Four of the interviews were done over email, three were done over Skype—an Internet audio/video calling system, and one was done in person with a journalist on assignment in Washington, D.C.

And it’s key to note that this researcher is an American. It’s impossible to know to what degree responses were shaped toward what journalists thought this researcher wanted to hear, or used the opportunity of this study to shape coverage of Islam in Egypt the way they wanted to shape it. But nevertheless, this research provides information on a
situated language medium that has no previous data recorded. It will be interesting to compare the data from this study to future studies of this kind.

Finally, chapter three focused on the findings of this study. In English-language news in Egypt, Islam is covered rarely as a subject unto itself. The Islam practiced on the streets of Cairo differs from person to person and that can be widely different from what is preached in the mosque. News coverage of Islam in the Egyptian English-language focuses on how it operates in the lives of everyday Egyptians—and that means that Islam appears in the culture and politics of the society.

**Limitations of the Study**

No study is perfect and this study was no exception. This section will provide a look at some of the key obstacles faced in the process of this study.

(1) *English-language Media is not Arabic-language Media*—in Egypt, there’s no debate: Arabic language media is what the majority of the population reads and discusses. It’s impossible to discuss more broadly “how Islam is covered in Egypt” from this study without noting that this only applies to English-language media. Journalists in interviews were quick to point out the differences between the English-language media and the Arabic-language media. They note that even the news values between Arabic-language and English-language media differ. So it would be a mistake to try to take the results of this to more broadly paint a picture of all media in Egypt.
(2) *Interviews via Skype/Email are not optimal*—In the case of this study, it made sense to allow interviews via email. Several sources wouldn’t have been able to comment at all with this researcher unless they were allowed to comment via email as Internet audio/video communications are against the policies of their organization. Yet they all were willing to meet in-person as many of the journalists assumed the research was taking place in Egypt. In the timeframe of this study, it was not feasible to be able to go to Egypt and perform first-hand interviews with journalists there. Besides the financial strain, it would have required facing considerable obstacles in securing a visa to perform research there. As it was, performing interviews via Skype and email required a considerable time commitment to receive approval from the Institutional Review Board. It took over four months to get approval to perform interviews with journalists there—and that was the Expedited Review. And since there was a time constraint for this study, performing interviews in Egypt wasn’t possible, but it would have been much preferred to be able to do all of the interviews in person.

(3) *The Time Frame chosen may not be the most representative of coverage*—In choosing a time frame for the content analysis, this researcher tried to find a time period which would focus a lot of discussion around Islamic issues but not have any sort of innately negative value on Islam (ie. coverage post 9/11). This time period was chosen because it was clear that there were conflicts with Coptic Christians and the Muslim Brotherhood—both of which would bring Islam into
public discourse. At the beginning of this project, the concern was that Islam was such an “understood” that there might not be suitable subject matter for discussion. This was obviously incorrect. But this time period may be unfairly weighted toward coverage of religious minorities. Interviewed journalists all stressed that they try to cover minorities fairly but many said more could be done. Many journalists would likely be surprised by the amount of coverage religious minorities got during this time period. Another time period might show far less coverage of religious minorities.

**Areas for Further Research**

For the sake of research on journalistic coverage of Islam, it would first of all be helpful to do this study with an additional coder. It would strengthen the findings of this study if inter-coder reliability could be established in the news framing analysis.

It would certainly be worthwhile to do a similar study of Arabic-language media. It would be interesting to see how Islam is covered in Egypt’s Arabic-language media and compare and contrast it to coverage in English-language media. Some scholarship seems to already indicate a difference in coverage, but such scholarship has largely been anecdotal (Eltahawy, 2007). Future content analytic studies might consider looking overall at the coverage of Islam using Poole’s lens to see how the coverage compares. But similarly, it would be fascinating to compare Arabic and English language coverage of a series of events. In the time period this study used, the key events included a change in leadership for the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nag Hammadi shootings on Coptic
Christmas Eve. Research on Arabic and English media covering such an event would also be interesting. It’s time in Arab media studies to go beyond looking at how just two articles compare and reach for higher fruit.

Another area of interest for further research could also be how coverage of Islam compares between Arab countries. Numerous studies that broadly look at the “Arab Press” all stress that it’s impossible to generalize. I agree and would like to see studies that show the rich diversity that appears in the Arab world—especially in interpretation of Islam, and how Islam is covered. It would be interesting for instance to do a similar study to this one on Morocco, where French influence is very strong. Has it affected the news culture of Morocco? How do French news values conflict with those of Moroccan? Examining the news coverage of other Arab countries could also held put an end to scholarship and research that examines the Arab world like a monolithic entity.

In conclusion, this study represents the beginning of a study into how individual Arab countries cover the issues that matter to them. In the Arab world, it would be difficult to imagine considering “issues that matter” without concluding that Islam is a part of that. Islam is a part of the very soul of Egypt and the life of the people who live there. Journalists have shown remarkable bravery and sensitivity in covering the subject. Journalistic coverage of terrorism and fundamentalism, in association of Islam, leaves many questions as to why the subject continues to arise and whether that’s related to audience. Many of the problems journalists see in coverage of Islam are rooted in perceived societal problems and, although English-language publications serve a different audience than Arab language media, they still provide an intensely nuanced view of the
Islam. It’s worth noting that there are substantial differences between coverage in the state-run press and the independent press in this study. Hopefully, this research will help journalists in the West better understand the nature of coverage of Islam in a Muslim-majority country and encourage further research into country-specific, media-specific coverage of Islam.
APPENDIX A: SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Note: this is only a sample of potential interview questions. These may not be the only questions asked and the course of the interview may have led to follow-up questions not noted. In all questions asked, the interviewee had the option to decline to answer if he/she so chooses.

-In what stories does the Islamic faith primarily arise? Events? Government stories? Person profiles?

-What is the process for stories concerning Islam? Is the writing/editing process any different from the writing of a typical story?

-Is the process for covering Islamic minorities in Egypt any different from that covering Sunni Islam?

-Do you feel like your news organization does an adequate job of covering Islam, in all its forms in Egypt? What, if anything, would you like to see done differently?

-What is the attitude toward reporting stories about Islam in English-language media? Is it a different attitude than that of reporting Islam in Arabic-language media? If so, why?

-What is the hardest story you’ve had to cover concerning Islam? What made it difficult?

-Do journalists at your organization feel comfortable covering Islam?
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