Middle Eastern Minorities in Global Media and the Politics of National Belonging

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Abstract

Since the Arab uprisings began in 2010, some communities have experienced increased levels of violence or insecurity on the basis of their ethnic, religious, or linguistic identity. This article examines how such communities have mobilized and developed their media strategies in order to protect themselves and adapt to their changing circumstances. Through investigating the cases of Coptic Christians in Egypt and Ezidis in Iraq, this article demonstrates that both of these communities have begun to connect their community interests with international political concerns and narratives through engaging with global media. Recent scholarship on indigenous media shows globalizing trends in media production and consumption have led indigenous media to increasingly tap into both national and global media to support their advocacy. In my case studies, the move to engage global media has particularly flourished since 2014 but the emphasis is on direct engagement with international political discourses through global media. Most notable is the mobilization of a campaign to recognize violence against Christians and Ezidis in the Middle East as genocide. The aims in engaging the international level differ between the Coptic and Ezidi cases. For Copts, there is a balance between raising the profile of violence against Copts in global media while employing narratives that support Egyptian state policies and strengthen pre-existing Coptic discourses of national belonging. Ezidi diaspora activists seek international protection and potentially an autonomous area in Iraq. This article argues that the differences in the terms and aims of global media engagement stem partly from the way the community perceives its status within the home nation, particularly with regards the notion of being a minority, as well as experiences of national belonging.

Introduction

Some scholars have described the post-2011 period and the emergence of the Arab uprisings as leading to a climate of revived or 'new sectarianism.' (Hinnebusch 2016; al-Rasheed 2011) While this has given rise to scholarship that seeks to analyze the causes and effects of this issue, there has been less of a focus on the ways in which different communities are responding to increased violence or persecution and how this connects to potential changes in their identity politics. In this article, I suggest that minorities/marginalized communities are increasingly seeking to intersect their concerns with global media flows and with the discourses of international political and international civil society, (Appadurai 1996; 2000) and this is leading to shifts in the 'politics and poetics of representation.' (Ginsburg 1991: 93) Two of the driving forces of this are the development of new media technologies, especially in the diaspora, and local political pressures introduced into the Middle East since 2011. Together these provide means and motive for the construction of a new global media imperative.

In this article, the case studies adopted are Coptic Orthodox Christians of Egypt and the Ezidis (also known as Yazidis or Yezidis) of Iraq. Both have been subject to violence as part of the

upheaval experienced since 2011. However, they represent very different cases in terms of their history and politics within their respective nations and involvement in national politics and the public sphere. While Coptic and Ezidi media in the home nations generally remain particularistic and focused on serving the social and cultural needs of the communities, community leaders in the diaspora are increasingly engaging with media and audiences outside of their communities to highlight the ways that the challenges faced by the community intersect with global issues. This is in line with recent research on global media and indigenous media, which suggests that communities 'often directly address the politics of identity and representation by engaging and challenging the dominant political forms at both the national and international level.' (Wilson and Stewart, 2008: 5)

While there has been a parallel development among both communities in terms of engagement in international rights discourses, the background to this shift, and the aims in undertaking it, differ between them. The differences between these case studies stem partly from the way the community perceives its status within the home nation, particularly with regards the notion of being a minority, and the extent and form of marginalization experienced in the national public space. I also suggest that this partly explains the different aims of the two communities in seeking to engage similar discourses of anti-terrorism and, most notably, genocide. I suggest that 2013 for the Copts and 2014 for the Ezidis represent the key turning point in terms of investigating changes in the identity politics of these case studies. The attacks on churches in Egypt following Mohammed Morsi's ouster in July 2013 and the attacks on Ezidis that began in August 2014 introduced a severe escalation in the level of threat experienced. As a result, both communities began to adopt and promote narratives that their protection is a global issue and not simply a localized or national one. From this point onwards, there is a greater concern to be pro-active in representing the community and its concerns globally as part of international concerns, for example on issues of human rights, acts of genocide or supporting democratization in the face of the threat of terrorism. This article examines the evolution of Coptic and Ezidi media strategies from a focus on particularistic media within the nation and diasporic communities, to strategies for engaging in global media flows.

The Dilemmas of Particularistic Media Usage: The Coptic and Ezidi Case Studies
Research on different forms of ethnic and minority media describes the construction of alternative media spaces that are seen as a crucial tool and space for the formation, negotiation and performance of alternatives identities. Since they are 'different' and 'alternative', this implies a binary of comparison with a 'normal' or 'mainstream' media sphere that does not incorporate or accurately represent all those within specific boundaries. Adopting a community media strategy is central to surviving pressures of assimilation and discrimination if it contributes to providing a space for the performance of identities otherwise excluded from the mainstream of public national media. As Riggins (1992: 3) argues, 'What better strategy could there be for ensuring minority survival than the development by minorities of their own media conveying their own point of view in their own language?' From this perspective, media is seen as compensatory and complementary. It is also particularistic.

According to Cottle, (2000: 24-5) one of the key functions of such alternative particularistic media is to compensate for gaps in mainstream media, while it can also act as a defense against underrepresentation or misrepresentation. (Caspi and Elias 2014: 11, 220) Both aspects focus on the community within its national context because it is within this national framework that the minority/majority or empowered/disempowered dialectic takes on meaning. Iskander (2012a: 57-9) describes in detail how particularistic Coptic media has acted as an alternative space to the national public sphere since Coptic visibility in the public sphere declined from the 1950s onwards. This separate autonomous space enabled the community to construct its identity and socialize

members into the community through platforms and narratives controlled by the community. (Ramzy 2016: 439) Coptic journalists argue that this can support the empowering of communities that perceive themselves to be the victims of inaccuracy and bias in national media.[i] This was supported by surveys of Coptic Christians both in Egypt and the diaspora that I carried out between 2007-2009. The main concern that emerged regarding Coptic community media was to empower the community members and to preserve an identity that is perceived as threatened and excluded from national life.

Despite this apparent enthusiasm for such media, Riggins (1992: 77) nevertheless acknowledges that using particularistic media to compensate for a community's lack of access to national public sphere can lead to an enhancement of their marginalization. This is also reflected in Iskander's (2012a; 2012b) work on Coptic Christian media in Egypt prior to 2011. This research found that too much emphasis on particularistic media potentially reduces the knowledge about the marginalized community in the public consciousness and so communities do need to balance the use of media for particularistic audiences with efforts to maintain visibility in mainstream media if they are to avoid enhancing isolating effects.   Indeed, while Copts acknowledge the value and necessity of community media, concerns were also voiced through surveys and interviews conducted by the author with Coptic audiences and Coptic media producers over the past decade. These indicated that Copts should not use this to isolate themselves but only to empower themselves as citizens.

This point was particularly raised by Yousef Sidhom, the editor of *Watani,* the only Coptic-run newspaper that is widely and publicly available in Egypt. He believes that *Watani*'s mission is to emphasize that Copts are Egyptian citizens and to ensure that *Watani* is visible in the national public space because if Coptic media focuses only on acting as an alternative space it has less intersections with national and international media that can lead to the reduction of knowledge and visibility of a community in the national public sphere.[ii] In the case of *Watani*, although the editor believes there is a small Muslim readership and the newspaper is indeed available outside of the church space, the paper's readership and content does remain heavily community-focused. The focus on Coptic affairs then reduces its appeal to audiences outside the community. This is a common characteristic of particularistic media leading to a dilemma of reducing community-focused content, which can lead to assimilation with the mainstream, or maintaining a community-focus but then enhancing separation from the national audience. (Riggins 1992: 14-15) It creates the dilemma of community media in that by providing for a community's specific needs it potentially leads to further marginalization and differentiation, as demonstrated by research on Aboriginal media in Australia. (Riggins, 1992: 77) Dayan's (1998) work on particularistic media also supports the argument that it is internally cohesive but encourages remoteness from society at large.

This is only problematic if the community is seeking to use community media as the primary mechanism to encourage greater integration or to advocate for greater inclusion at the national level. In general, particularistic media has not aimed to serve this function for either Copts or Ezidis but rather it serves an internal audience. This is not to say that there are no Copts or Ezidis appearing in national media. Individual journalists and activists from both communities do participate in the national public sphere. But in terms of media produced by Copts and Ezidis from their community viewpoint, this has minimal visibility in the contemporary mainstream media scenes of Egypt or Iraq.

For Copts, the function of Coptic-produced media is largely to support the religious aspect of Coptic identity that is not served by the public sphere, whereas for the purpose of empowering national belonging discourses, Copts draw largely on national public discourses that are historically

entrenched at the national level. This mainly focuses on the national unity symbolism of 'cross and crescent' that is rooted in the commemoration of the 1919 Revolution. (Iskander 2012b: 34; Ibrahim 2010) Particularistic media forms a function that is separate yet intertwined with Coptic Egyptian identity, with careful avoidance in both official public media and Coptic particularistic media of narratives that would contradict *al-Wahda al-Wataniya*. In fact, the imagery and language of Coptic media reinforces the integral part that the Egyptian homeland symbolizes for Coptic identity. (Iskander 2012a: 11-16, 48-55) One example of an image that draws the aspects of Coptic identity together, and that can frequently be seen in Coptic media, is the image of the Holy Family in exile in Egypt with the pyramids of Giza in the background.

In the case of Ezidis, the aim of their pre-2014 particularistic media was generally not to increase community visibility at the national level. The Ezidis of Iraq had not placed significant emphasis on media prior to the crisis that began with the invasion of their traditional territories in northern Iraq in August 2014 and the community media that did exist prior to this was mainly used within the community to circulate Ezidi culture and support education. However, this was limited in significance in part, according to an Ezidi NGO, due to the Ezidi tradition of preserving their faith and traditions orally.[iii] Furthermore, a broad and well-developed media network was less crucial because the Ezidis, unlike Copts, are a compact community, meaning they are largely concentrated in one area of Iraq. Ezidi culture is largely centered around northern Iraq and this focus is demonstrated in the use of the name Lalish for many media platforms in reference to the town of Lalish which is the spiritual center for Ezidis and a place of pilgrimage. As well as this and frequent use of the peacock image, a symbol of Ezidi religion, there is also frequent use of the Ezidi flag visible, especially in the post-2014 surge in Ezidi media.

The symbolism and imagery of Ezidi media then often reinforces both the religious and the ethnic differences between Ezidi Iraqis and Iraqis belonging to non-Ezidi communities. Both ethnic and religious aspects are important to Ezidi identity politics. Diaspora activists frequently refer to tensions within the community regarding the labelling of Ezidis as ethnically Kurdish and many often refer to 74 historical genocides and to discrimination that Ezidis have historically experienced, which they explain as resulting from the Ezidi religion not being one that is recognized by Islam.[iv] This is in contrast to Christians and Jews who are recognized as People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*), a status which sets up rules of cooperation and protection between them and Muslims. (Maisel 2013: 34) As a result of their uncertain status, both in terms of ethnicity and of religion, the Ezidis as a community have generally preferred to keep a low profile within the Iraqi nation to avoid conflict. Tensions have increased though since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and with the increasingly assertive Kurdish regional Government (KRG), which is also based in northern Iraq.[v] Consequently, Ezidi journalists and activists suggest that while developing a strong media sector was not a focus for the community before the 2003 it has become increasingly vital[vi].

The other use of Ezidi media has been to contribute to negotiating the community's political status vis-a-vis the KRG. For example, while Ezidis have a television channel, *Merkez Lalish*, this is seen by some Ezidi activists and journalists as linked to the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP).[vii] This trend seems to be mirrored by the experiences of Ezidis in Syria according to Maisel. (2016: 5) Several of the Ezidi media professionals and activists I interviewed described how some of the Ezidi media that was available was overseen by the national government or by the KRG, who co-opted it for their own political projects.[viii] Consequently, Ezidis often lacked media platforms that were truly their own spaces for free self-expression of their identity. This lack of a well-developed and autonomous media sector, the sense of distance from the national government in Baghdad relative to the dominant role in the local politics of Ezidi towns by the KRG, and the prevailing sense of differences between the different communities that make up the Iraqi nation, have all contributed to the context in which Ezidi media post-2014 began to rapidly develop.

Particularistic Media, Global Media, and the Nation

Both scholarship and the experiences of the two case studies briefly described above demonstrate that the function of filling a compensatory need to support a community and preserve its identity and culture can often be the primary function of a community's media. However, the pressures of globalization, along with socio-political change and migration, have led to changes to the needs of audiences of community media, as well as to general media practices and the relationship between media producers and consumers. As Deuze (2006: 262) argues, the apparent success of community media must be viewed within the context of 'the worldwide emergence of all kinds of community, alternative, oppositional, participatory and collaborative media practices, in part amplified by the internet.' The growth of social media represents perhaps one of the biggest developments in the way we create and consume media and is being increasingly adopted by activists. (Obar, Zube and Lampe 2012) Both Coptic and Ezidi media have developed its presence in social media in order to support networks within the community, as well as to link community concerns into global media conversations. For example, the hashtag #CopticLivesMatter quickly appeared on Twitter in May 2017 after an attack on a bus of Coptic pilgrims.

There is insufficient space in this article to fully unpack the relationship between media and globalization and the complexity of its effects. However, in an increasingly globalized world connected by new media and experiencing waves of displaced peoples, the contemporary meaning of borders and relations between the global and the local are becoming of interest to many different academic disciplines. This also raises questions about the operation of particularistic media and if, or how, it is changing in this climate. Recent scholarship on global indigenous media has addressed many of these issues. As Wilson and Stewart (2008: 18) argue that: 'In the context of globalization and the rise of international indigenism of the last two decades, the use and mobilization of media have become increasingly central at all levels of organization: local, national and inter or transnational.' Scholars of this media acknowledge that defining what constitutes indigenous media as a category in today's global cultural politics is problematic, leading Alia (2010: 14) to argue that there is a consensus among scholars and activists not to define indigeneity but to focus instead on defining and protecting rights. However, this literature draws on decades of rich qualitative research into the cultural anthropology of the media that is instructive in examining the contemporary Coptic and Ezidi cases. Therefore, although I hesitate to apply the term indigenous to Coptic and Ezidi media, there are instructive commonalities in the literature on global indigenous media.

There are also subtle differences. Wilson and Stewart (2008: 2) identify a shift in the 2000s during which locally based indigenous media production has 'become part of globally linked media networks with increased effectiveness and reach.' They suggest that this evolved in reaction to the development of rights discourses in the post-World War II period and often revolved around advocacy for land returns. This shift has not been as straightforward in the Coptic and Ezidi case studies but has become much more visible and developed only in recent years. I suggest that it is the extreme circumstances, introduced into the region by a surge in violence and insecurity, have instead necessitated this recent, rapid move focused towards the international. This is not entirely exceptional. Brooten's (2008) chapter on Burma in the Wilson and Stewart volume suggests that indigenous peoples are sometimes forced to bypass the nation state when the situation requires visibility and protection at the international level.

It is my contention that the previous weaknesses in Coptic and Ezidi media engagement at the national and international levels was informed by political and historical factors, particularly those related to the evolution of nationalist movements in Egypt and Iraq during the post-World War I colonial period that has shaped the relationships between communities and attitudes to the term

minority. Whereas Copts have a central narrative of belonging to the Egyptian nation and vehemently deny the minority label as undermining their understanding of the way Coptic and Egyptian identity are intertwined,[ix] Ezidi activists tend to have less of a negative relationship with the term minority.[x] For Copts, protection has been sought through promoting ideas of national unity and citizenship, emphasizing the Coptic heritage of Egypt and, in recent decades, promoting a 'pact' for mutual support between church and political authorities. (Tadros 2009, 2013; McCallum 2010; Iskander 2012a, 2012b; Makari 2007) In contrast, Ezidis see themselves as both an ethnically and religiously distinct people within a state made up of a number of distinct nations or components (*qawmiyat* or *makowwanat*). This stems from the different context of the emergence of the Iraqi nation, as it consists of many diverse communities with different religious, ethnic, and linguistic identities.

In Egypt, the term 'minority' is particularly poisonous for the sacred national unity narrative. For Egyptian Christians, the label minority negates the indigeneity that forms an inseparable aspect of constructions of "Copticness," (Iskander 2012a) it also undermines the strong contribution made by Christians in the nationalist movement, especially through the *Wafd* Party. This is summed up by the stance of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. Coptic Patriarch Tawadros I said in an interview in 2013: 'Yes, we are a minority in the numerical sense, but we are not a minority when it comes to value, history, interaction, and love for our nation.'[xi] Furthermore, the term minority undermines the public discourse of unity between Muslims and Christians that forms a well-entrenched narrative across Egyptian society. Finally, it is associated with the colonial period and foreign intervention. When Britain declared Egypt's independence in 1922, a list of principles was issued to protect British interests in Egypt, including the right to intervene to protect minorities and foreign interests. Egyptian nationalists, including Christians, strongly rejected the need for any protection and rejected the term "minority." In the eventual Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 no mention was made of minorities. There was also an objection to the proposal of giving reserved seats in parliament to Copts or special 'minority' rights in the constitution of 1923. Instead article 3 enshrines equality, with no discrimination on the basis of origin, language or religion.

Similarly, in Iraq, laws enshrine equality among citizens. Iraq's first constitution mentioned the term minority in Article 37, referring to the need to secure representation of non-Muslims in parliament. The requirement of guaranteeing minority rights was a central issue for mandate countries in seeking to gain independence. This is the only use of the term however, and Article 18 states that all Iraqis are equal in status. In the current constitution, drafted in 2005, the word minority is not used at all. The different groups are described as nations or components of Iraq, and each is given full freedom and equality in law.

Nevertheless, marginalization and sectarianism were not eliminated in either Egypt or Iraq by such legal provisions. (Ali and Hanna 2002: 116) It is beyond the scope of this article to detail the forms this has taken historically but there is a plethora of recent scholarship that does examine the processes that have (re)produced minoritization, sectarianism and the exclusion of certain communities from public culture and national identity discourses (for example Haddad 2011; Iskander 2012a; Matthiesen 2015; Kymlicka and Pfostl 2014). While legal culture and political speech has sought to eliminate differences between communities, the everyday experiences of marginalization and discrimination are a reality for many different communities. Developing particularistic media has been one expression of community responses to this. I suggest that in the case of the Copts, concerns about accusations of betrayal of Egypt prevent explicit advocacy at the national level and lead to a degree of self-censorship in Coptic media. In the Ezidi case, the entrenched sense of separation between the community and the national political regime has created a gap in trust and confidence in the ability or will of the nation to accept increased Ezidi

activism at the national level. Consequently, in the past much of the Ezidi community media in Iraq tended to be inward-facing and not nation-facing.

Developments in Coptic and Ezidi Diasporic Media
This inward-facing tendency within the national context in Egypt and Iraq has of course been affected by relations with the development of Coptic and Ezidi diasporas. The advent of new media technologies has also contributed to shifts in the way both communities employ particularistic media. It is not the intention here to theorize the impact of globalization on diasporic media but its central to understand the flows of media between the local and global in the Coptic and Ezidi examples in order to understand the role now being played by diasporas in global media engagement.

I. Coptic Diaspora Media
Copts have a diaspora that has been well established since the 1960s in Europe, America, Canada and Australia (Saad 2010). While the growth of these diasporic communities and the development of new media technologies have given an increased ability to those outside of traditional community leadership (usually from the church hierarchy) to the means for producing Coptic media, questions remain about the impact of media produced outside the community's official leadership. (Iskander 2012a) Riggins (1992) suggests that new forms of media can be used to bypass traditional leadership but Iskander voices caution about overestimating electronic media's ability to bypass community authority and leaders, suggesting that community media is often used to affirm traditional structures as a way of preserving identity or balance assimilation in local societies with building ties with the homeland. In the Coptic case, the main Coptic satellite channels are operated by the Coptic Church, which has also developed an influential online presence. The Coptic Church is central to socializing Copts into the community in the diaspora as it is in Egypt and the church has embraced media to support this function. (Brinkerhoff 2015; Armanious and Amstutz 2013; Saad and Westbrook 2017)

However, the new reality presented by online media is having an impact by necessitating the adoption of new technology among the traditional leadership and the trend towards participatory engagement with media. In mass media, the audience is a passive consumer, but through new media, especially social media, there is increased space for interaction. (Shirky 2011; 29) Media platforms are therefore not only places where identity is transmitted but also where identity is (re)negotiated and expressed beyond local limitations imposed on communities. (Jones 1998: 63) According to Couldry and Dreher (2007: 84) 'These allow for collective conversations both within and beyond nation-states and the formation of hybrid identities.'

Online media engages with audiences differently (Georgiou, 82-3: 2013) because it has made the border between audiences more porous and blurred lines between audiences and producers. This has also overcome restrictions occurring in the national context. Whereas a church publication in Egypt might have been only available inside the bookshop of a specific church in the past, now it is accessible to anyone with an interest and an internet connection According to Armanious and Amstutz (2013: 514) Coptic films have been made for decades but 'For years and ostensibly until the present, the Egyptian government restricted their circulation to churches.' Despite this kind of limitation in the national context, the films are sold in churches globally and are now increasingly accessible through satellite television and the Internet. These developments mean that not only Copts access such material more easily through bypassing boundaries imposed by the state but also the material is available to audiences outside the community. In this way, Coptic media has become part of a globalized flow of identity-based media. As a result, 'For the first time, Coptic concerns, issues, and religious life have become available to all subscribers of major satellite carriers throughout the region and internationally.' (Armanious and Amstutz 2013: 514)

Online media has also enabled diasporas to become more "networked" into the affairs of the community in the homeland. This does not mean that the involvement of diasporas in the politics of the homeland is always welcomed. The Copts have often had an uncomfortable relationship with Coptic diaspora activists, (Iskander 2012b) which relates to the question of whether Copts are a minority in the nation or whether they need outside protection. The official Church line within Egypt has often been that there is no persecution and that Copts are an integral part of the national fabric of Egypt.[xii] The diaspora activists that stepped over the line vis-à-vis the official stance were attacked in Egyptian media, as part of supporting the argument that Copts do not need outside interference and that their protection is secured within the nation as citizens. In the 1990s and 2000s, some Coptic activists in the diaspora tried to mobilize a human rights discourse of minority protection, often leading them to step outside the "official" community media sphere led by the church. This conflict with prevailing community discourses led to conflict and often reduced their legitimacy as spokespeople within the community. These diaspora Copts were not only rejected as Copts but also as Egyptians (one and the same in the national unity discourse of both state and church). This ensured that diaspora media remained largely produced by traditional community leaders, mainly from the church, and existed largely to serve the religious and cultural needs of the local community as well as to link it to the transnational, but still particularistic, Coptic media community.

II. Ezidi Diaspora Media

Ezidi diasporic media presents a different trajectory with regards to its development and its gatekeepers. The Ezidi diaspora has grown rapidly since 2014 and it is suggested that after this around 15 per cent of the Ezidi population fled to try to join the pre-existing diaspora in Germany, the UK, America and Canada. (Marr and al-Marashi 2017) However, before this it was relatively small. According to Yezidis International, a US-based NGO, the vast majority of Ezidis live in Iraq around Mosul and Sinjar in the north. They estimate that the population is around 500,000. Outside of Iraq, probably the largest community is in Armenia, where there is an estimated 40,000 Ezidis. Historically there was a large community in Turkey but it is thought that most have emigrated to Germany where there is thought to be approximately 30,000 Ezidis concentrated in the western states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony. Emigration rates from Iraq increased after the 2003 war with many joining the diaspora in Germany and since 2008 there has been a growing Ezidi community established in Sweden, numbering an estimated 10, 000. There are much smaller communities based in the UK, US, Canada, Belgium, France and others but they are all probably less than 5000 people.[xiii] Yezidis International put the total population of Ezidis at around 700, 000 to one million but claim this is decreasing due to the violence since 2014.[xiv]

The NGO Yezidis International has expressed concerns that even if Ezidis can survive the brutality of IS and the political situation in Iraq, the dispersal of Ezidis worldwide could lead to the disappearance of their culture if the community continues to rely only on the oral tradition to preserve its identity.[xv] Community media has thus quickly had to establish transnational networks to strengthen links and resources for Ezidis. The largest community is based in Germany where EzidiPress was established in 2013 as a blog for the purpose of empowering Ezidi youth with a sense of confidence in their history and identity.[xvi] Shortly after this and with the outbreak of violence in Iraq EzidiPress expanded as the need for community solidarity grew. Ezidis from Turkey, Syria, Russia, Georgia and Armenia joined EzidiPress to establish a multilingual news site in order to reach the various Ezidi diaspora groups and to raise awareness about what was happening in Sinjar. To reach as wide an audience as possible EzidiPress began to publish in six languages: German, English, Kurmanji, Russian, French, and Arabic. They also have ambitions to add a TV channel.

The establishment of such online media networks has been largely in response to the dramatic socio-political circumstances affecting the Ezidi community, while the existence of new media technology has provided a platform. According to Hayri Demir, Chief-Editor at EzidiPress, "The need for fast communication is increasing and will be ultimately necessary for the survival of the Ezidis."[xvii] These networks are serving the function of supporting them in assimilating in their new nations but also preserving their cultural and religious heritage. It also demonstrates an assertiveness. It is worth noting here that although the term Ezidi is not common in English usage I have used it in this article as a response to interviews with several Ezidi activists who argue that the term Ezidi is more accurate. This seems to be an illustration of a new assertive attitude among Ezidis who are taking agency over their representation internationally as a result of the dramatic change in the socio-political situation. This change has also caused Ezidis to react and to adopt a media strategy through using online media to raise their profile, both transnationally among the growing Ezidi diaspora and globally among the international community.

While the change in circumstances has accelerated this, it has been able to grow so quickly because of the existence of new media technologies and in particular social media, leading to greater decentralization. (Ginsburg 1991: 96) Ezidi diasporic media is led largely by young activists. In the Coptic case, the church developed a strong diaspora media network based on its experience with producing Coptic media in Egypt and has thereby retained authority in the diaspora. This contrasts with the way that young Ezidi activists employing new media and international activism and discourses have become the most vocal leaders of Ezidi diasporic media. Alongside Ezidi media there has also been the establishment of NGOs such as Yazda and Yezidis International, both founded in 2014. Due to the difference in the formation of diasporic media and the differences in those leading its development, Ezidi media aligned itself more quickly and easily with global media flows beyond the community and from the beginning sought to intersect Ezidi media with international rights discourses as a central aspect of efforts to use media to publicize the community's concerns and to seek protection and preservation of the community.

Terror and the Politics of Genocide Recognition:
Copts and Ezidis in Global Media Since 2013/4
The discussion so far has sought to illustrate that a variety of political, historical and technological factors have contributed to shaping the use of media of by minorities, indigenous peoples, or communities marginalized at the national level. The case studies presented here show some commonalities with shifts identified in indigenous media scholarship in recent years. However, there seems to have been less engagement of community media in the national public space than might be expected considering this scholarship. In the Coptic case, the national public narratives of national unity supported by the state and the church leadership, are promoted through particularistic media and publicly as the most appropriate mechanism though which to achieve inclusion. In the Ezidi case, the more clearly divided nature of society into often territorially compact groups, the dynamics of power operating between Ezidis and Kurdish authorities and the traditional stance of remaining generally aloof from the politics of the national government, also contributed to a lack of strong media engagement and advocacy at the national level. This will be further unpacked here through an examination of shifts in Coptic media initiated by the 2011 uprising and through the global campaign for genocide recognition since 2014 that is the focus of diasporic Ezidi media.

Immediately after the January 25 uprising of 2011, there was increased visibility of discourses and campaigns calling for improved Coptic rights in the Egyptian national context. Part of this climate was an increased willingness of Copts to bypass the traditional spokesmen, who are generally drawn from the church leadership. There were already some signs of dissent between Copts and the church over their status in the nation. In 2010, Coptic leaders in Egypt were unable to contain

the anger of Copts towards the government after it halted the building of a church in Giza in November 2010. Copts also expressed their anger publicly in the wake of the bombing of *al-Qidissayn* Church in Alexandria on 1 January 2011. (Monier 2012) This sense of frustration was part of the national climate at this point just prior to the uprising that began on 25 January 2011, in which Copts participated fully as Egyptian citizens. It appeared that the uprising presented an opportunity for Copts to overcome some marginalization effects, leading them to seize public spaces to increase their visibility in the national public sphere and their concerns about their ability to act as full and equal citizens. However, in the ensuing instability and atmosphere of lawlessness that heightened the atmosphere of general insecurity, (Tadros 2015; Falk 2016) Egyptian national media began to adopt a narrative of 'factional interests' in referring to the demands of Copts and contrasted them with 'Egyptian interests' which had to take priority over those of Copts, as if they were mutually exclusive. (Monier 2012) This seemed to reinforce a sense that Copts are located on the periphery of the nation and, to a great extent, Egypt then witnessed a return to Coptic interests being expressed at the national level through voices sanctioned by the church.

With this failure to maintain a place for Coptic advocacy in the public sphere within Egypt, Coptic diasporic spaces took on a renewed importance and some (community-authorized) Coptic figures have increasingly been speaking out about the targeting of Copts. They tend to balance this with a parallel focus on supporting the Egyptian government's efforts to tackle terrorism. Two bishops that have become increasingly visible in international and social media are Bishop Suriel, Coptic Orthodox Bishop of Melbourne (see Saad and Westbrook 2016) and Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom. My analysis of their contributions to global and social media on the topic of the persecution of Middle Eastern Christians, reveals that both have begun to increasingly comment on this issue since 2011. Prior to 2011, neither commented significantly on this issue and most mentions were made within community media, particularly diaspora websites such as www.lacopts.org, and usually referring to the historic period of persecution of Copts under the Emperor Diocletian in the third and fourth centuries; a period that still holds significance for contemporary Coptic identity as the age of martyrs and the start of the Coptic calendar. (Heo 2013) However, from 2011 both bishops have spoken increasingly to the media on the issue of persecution. This is still often within the spaces of community media but also expands to Christian media more broadly.[xviii] From 2013 onwards these contributions, in the form of articles, social media posts, tweets, and interviews with global and national news channels, increased significantly.

The significance of this increased media presence from 2013 over 2011 is twofold. Although this is two years after the uprising, it is 2013 when the Muslim Brotherhood president Mohammed Morsi is ousted and replaced by Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, a figure supported from the beginning by the Coptic Patriarch. (Guirguis, 2016: 96) This change allayed some fears Copts had about the security of their status in Egypt under a Muslim Brotherhood government and they also saw in al-Sisi a symbol of hope for the realization of a culture of full equal citizenship.[xix] (Monier 2012) This reduced concerns about the impact of discussing issues related to Copts in global media on the security of Christians inside Egypt. Another element of this change was that fighting international terrorism, symbolized by the Muslim Brotherhood, became a central narrative for the government. (Monier and Ranko 2013) The campaign against the Brotherhood was constructed as a global one that Egypt was fighting on behalf of international society and Copts were able to frame their safety in Egypt as part of this fight against terrorism. Therefore, highlighting the suffering of Christians globally served to underline the legitimacy of the Egyptian government's stance against the Brotherhood and terrorism more generally.

A new dynamic was added in 2015 when 21 Copts were murdered by IS affiliates in Libya and in 2017 when IS declared that Copts had become a major target for attacks. (Tadros 2017) This lead

to an intersection of interests between Egyptian, Coptic and global interests against the brutality of IS. This has also led to the usage of the term 'genocide' to describe what is happening to Christians in the Middle East[xx] and Bishop Angaelos was a vocal member of a campaign for IS's atrocities against Christians and Ezidis to be termed a genocide by the US congress. It is important to note that he speaks of a genocide against Middle Eastern Christians and Ezidis and not just Copts, because he is representing this as a global issue beyond borders and not a localized Coptic or Egyptian problem.[xxi]

In this way, these new interactions with global media and politics answer the dilemma of how to highlight the problems faced by Copts in Egypt through the media without threatening the status quo in relations between the church and the government and leading to increased difficulties for Christians in Egypt. The emergence of the discourse of the Egyptian government and people united against the terrorist threat means that Copts can more easily highlight the violence perpetrated against them publicly, while reducing the risk of being accused of betraying the Egyptian nation. By increasing the visibility of Copts through interactions between Coptic leaders and global media, the community is taking an increasingly pro-active stance, which is still very balanced with Egyptian patriotism and supporting Egyptian national sovereignty. Although Copts are engaging with the media on the subject of the attacks against their community by tapping into global discourses, they continue to hold to their historic stance that the protection of Copts is to be found in their Egyptian citizenship, not outside interference. (Labib 2004) In this sense, Copts are not bypassing the nation in doing this but are actually seeking to reinforce national unity narratives and calls to strengthen the culture of citizenship. Conducting this advocacy from the international level avoids risking the pact of cooperation between church and state established between Shenouda and Mubarak and that has been reinforced under al-Sisi and Tawadros. (Tadros 2013; Iskander 2012a; MacCallum 2010) It also avoids the marginalizing accusations of factional interests that raising issues of Coptic rights directly at national level has provoked.

In contrast, diaspora Ezidis are bypassing the national level more explicitly by engaging in calls for direct international protection and raising the possibility of an autonomous area for either Ezidis alone or for Iraqi Christians and Ezidis together. Genocide recognition can act to strengthen the claims for this. (Baser and Toivanen 2017) It also taps into Ezidi community memories of repeated historical attempts to commit genocides against them, as well as the more widely known genocide discourses central to Armenian and Assyrian identity politics (see Atto 2016; Paul 2000). This is perhaps a natural reaction to the incredibly brutal violence committed by IS against Ezidis. IS entered Mosul in June 2014, giving the Christian majority there a choice of converting to Islam, paying *Jizya*,[xxii] leaving immediately or being put to death. Less than two months later, IS moved on to the Ezidi stronghold of Sinjar and the surrounding areas. As a result, thousands were killed or taken into slavery, while many more fled the area. This has significantly altered the dynamics of the community in a short period of time. It has also generated a significant amount of distrust and insecurity. Many do not believe that the Iraqi nation or the KRG can provide them security or eradicate the experience of marginalization and persecution that Ezidis have faced historically, in fact some activists argue that these governments are helping to create the conditions for an Ezidi genocide.[xxiii]

This lack of trust in the national and regional authorities has pushed some Ezidi activists to seek solutions globally by reaching out to international activists and raising their voices through global media. To gain resonance these activists realize that their narratives need to be picked up by mainstream global media to achieve maximum impact. (Thorsen et al 2015: 3) Genocide recognition has been successfully employed to achieve visibility and impact. Using this discourse, the Ezidi community has begun to challenge the international community to protect it. Intersecting with global media, providing the Ezidi perspective on events and making the community more

visible have all been central to this strategy. Nadia Murad, who was appointed a UN Goodwill Ambassador in September 2016, has become a symbol of the community through representing Ezidis on media and political platforms. Her high profile and cooperation with lawyer Amal Clooney contributed to the case for the UN officially designating the violence against Ezidis as a genocide, a key development in the contemporary identity construction of the community and in connecting the persecution of Ezidis with international civil society. (Appadurai 1996: 3)

For many of the activists that have emerged from this current crisis, standing before a global audience to raise awareness about the Ezidi community now appears to be the only way to achieve security for Ezidis in Iraq, or failing that to call for asylum to be granted to Ezidis outside of the Middle East region. The aims are similar to those of traditional community media; to preserve and protect a community whose security and heritage are at risk. But they are using the new tools available to them, very much including new and global media, in order to ensure the interests of the community are intersecting with international civil society and international politics. The joining of Coptic diaspora leaders with Ezidis in the discourse of recognizing the violence against Middle Eastern Christians and Ezidis as a genocide is a demonstration of how these case studies align with scholarship on indigenous media and global communication that points to the trend in collective engagement at the global level (see Landzelius 2006). As Alia (2010: 7) describes, "some of the world's least powerful people … are using radio, television, print and a range of new media to amplify their voices, extend the range of reception and expand their collective power." On Nadia Murad's personal website, she states that her mission is 'to be a global voice for survivors.'[xxiv] This non-specific reference to survivors illustrates how media is being used in universalising the suffering of a group to expand collective power beyond national borders. At the same time as seeking collective solidarity, this activism seeks a solution that should be implemented in the specific local or national context of the community in order to secure the survival of its own particularistic identity.

Conclusion
This article has considered how the political climate of insecurity post-2011 (see Monier 2015) has lead marginalized/minority communities in the Middle East to change their media practices and priorities. Both communities had been using particularistic media in the homeland and diaspora to serve the internal needs of the community, such as transmission of heritage and socialization into community identity and cultural and religious practices. However, increased migration, instability and persecution in traditional homelands have resulted in the development of media strategies that support the community through engaging with global media to make the community's fears and problems visible beyond national or community boundaries. The central purpose of this is to secure community survival by speaking to issues of both local and global concern, resulting in the amplification of the community's voice. The exact messages, the way they are circulated and by whom have been shaped by the prevailing identity politics of the community in terms of its conceptions of national belonging and its strategy for long-term survival in its local context.

In the case of the Ezidis the threat to survival has been severe, forcing it to seek direct protection outside the nation from the international community. Some activists also call for an autonomous region for Ezidis centred on their traditional territories in northern Iraq. Central to this new engagement in global media and activism is the campaign to recognize the violence against Ezidis since 2014 as a genocide. In contrast, although the Copts have been reluctant to highlight issues of discrimination for fear of undermining their stance rejecting the minority term and any need for foreign protection, the threat of IS has altered their engagement with media to play a role in shaping responses to the terrorists that are targeting their community in Egypt. However, they do not seek help as an endangered minority but call for international support for the Egyptian nation and Egyptian people in countering terrorism worldwide. Additionally, there is the emerging

discourse, especially promoted by Bishops Angaleos and Suriel, of including Copts in a global campaign to treat the violence against Christians and Ezidis across the region as a genocide. Again, Copts are not singled out as a minority and there are no calls for practical foreign intervention or for any kind of intervention in the Egyptian nation for an autonomous region for Copts, a concept that his historically deeply distasteful for Copts.

These differences are partly to do with the different dynamics of the communities in their national context and partly to do with the different circumstances of the attacks against them to date. But through the pressures of socio-political upheaval and via the platforms offered by new media technology, both Coptic and Ezidi figures are increasingly interacting with international civil society and global media flows. In this way, both groups seek highlight the intersections between their issues and global political interests. Appealing to the concept of universal human rights discourses, and in particular of genocide, Copts and Ezidis are able to engage directly in the challenges that threaten their status or act as obstacles to full inclusion, albeit it to different degrees, at the national level. In both cases, the eventual aim is to secure the survival of their community and protection of their specific culture and identity. While Copts seek to achieve this by reinforcing Egyptian national belonging, some Ezidis have lost faith in the Iraqi national government and see their best hope for the future is in a secured Ezidi region in Iraq. The politics of national belonging is thereby central in understanding the shifts in media usage and the reasons why activists and community leaders have adopted certain discourses in their engagement with global media flows.

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[i] Author interview with Coptic journalist Kamal Zakher 2007; Author interview with Coptic journalist Hany Labib 2008.

[ii] Author Interview with Yousef Sidhom editor of Watani newspaper, 2008.

[iii] Author interview with the NGO Yezidis International August 2016.

[iv] Author Interviews Yezidis International August 2016; Author interview Ezidi activist Elias Kasem February 2017; Author interview with Ezidi activist Khalaf Smoqi.

[v] Author interview Ezidi activist Elias Kasem February 2017; Author interviews with Ezidi Press, July 2016 and February 2017; Author interview with Yezidis International (NGO), August 2016.

[vi] Author interview EzidiPress July 2016.

[vii] Author interview Ezidi press July 2016.

[viii] Author interview with the NGO Yezidis International August 2016; Author interview EzidiPress July 2016; Author interview with Ezidi activist Khalaf Smoqi February 2017; Author interview with Ezidi activist Elias Kasem February 2017.

[ix] Historically the word Coptic, a corruption of the Greek word for Egypt, simply meant Egyptian. After the Arab conquest of Egypt in 642AD and the slow but steady transformation of Egypt from a Christian to a Muslim majority nation, Copt came to mean Egyptian Christians exclusively.

[x] Author interviews Ezidi activist Khalaf Smoqi February 2017; Ezidi activist Elias Kasem February 2017.

[xi] Weber, K. (February 13 2013) Egypt's Coptic Leader: 'Christians Are Not a Minority in Terms of Value to the Nation', *The Christian Post*, Online http://www.christianpost.com/news/egypts-coptic-leader-christians-are-not-a-minority-in-terms-of-value-to-the-nation-89697/ accessed 21 April 2017.

[xii] For example al-Watan Voice (2001), Baba Shenouda li Washington: al-Aqbat le yua'anun min al-Ittihad [Pope Shenouda to Washington: Copts do not suffer persecution.] online https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2011/01/05/164724.html accessed 24 April 2017.

[xiii] See Yezidis International, *About the Yezidis*, http://www.yezidisinternational.org/abouttheyezidipeople/ accessed 4 May 2017.

[xiv] Author Interview Yezidis International August 2016.

[xv] Author interview with the NGO Yezidis International August 2016.

[xvi] Author interview EzidiPress July 2016.

[xvii] Ibid.

[xviii] For example, el-Manara (6 November 2011), online http://elmanara.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/NovEnglish.pdf accessed 24 April 2017.

[xix] Author interview, Bishop Angaelos, 2013; Author interview Ibrahim Habib, Copts United UK, 2013.

[xx] For example, see Bishop Angaelos on BBC Hardtalk 21 April 2017, online http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-39669099 accessed 24 April 2017.

[xxi] For example see the press release of the Coptic Church UK on March 2016 online at http://copticcentre.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/hg-bishop-angaelos-speaks-on-national.html accessed 4 May 2017.

[xxii] Jizya is a tax on recognized non-Muslim communities, including Christianity and Judaism. In this case it was reportedly set at a level so high that even the wealthiest could not afford to pay it.

[xxiii] Author interviews with Ezidi activist Khalaf Smoqi February 2017; Ezidi activist Elias Kasem February 2017; Yezidis International August 2016.

[xxiv] http://www.nadiamurad.org/new-page-1/ accessed 24 April 2017.