A Presence without a Narrative: The Greeks in Egypt, 1961-1976: Une présence sans récit : la communauté grecque en Égypte, 1961-1976

Mylona, E.

A Presence without a Narrative: The Greeks in Egypt, 1961-1976

Une présence sans récit : la communauté grecque en Égypte, 1961-1976.

Eftychia Mylona

Eftychia Mylona[*]

A Presence without a Narrative

The Greeks in Egypt, 1961-1976

Abstract: This paper examines the upward social mobility of the Greek community in Egypt from the implementation of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Nationalization Laws of 1961 up until the introduction of the *infitah* policies of Anwar Sadat in 1976. Both Greek and Egyptian historiographies ceased to explore the activities of the Greek community that remained in Egypt following the massive departure of Greeks in 1961-1962. Instead, they focus mainly on the Greek benefactors and the important social and economic capital they provided when the community was at its demographic peak. Additionally, they focus on Nasser's policies, in particular the growth of Arab national-ism and the implementation of the Nationalization Laws. This focus overlooks the actual social mobility experienced by the lower and middle-class Greeks who remained in Egypt and evolved socially. What's more this social mobility calls into question the construction of a homogeneous social and economic post-colonial Egyptian state.

Keywords: Mobility, Presence, Narratives, Memory, Greek diaspora, Egypt

Résumé : *Une présence sans récit : la communauté grecque en Égypte, 1961-1976.* Cet article examine l'ascension sociale de la communauté grecque en Égypte après la mise en œuvre des Lois de nationalisation de Gamal Abdel Nasser en 1961 jusqu'au lancement des politiques *infitah* par Anwar Al-Sadat en 1976. Les historiographies grecques et égyptiennes ont cessé d'étudier les activités de la communauté grecque d'Égypte après l'exode massif de 1961-62. Elles se concentrent principalement sur les mécènes grecs et sur l'important capital social et économique qu'ils avaient apporté, lorsque cette communauté était à son pic démographique.

[*] Leiden University, LIAS, Leiden, Pays-Bas

De plus, elles se focalisent sur la politique de Nasser, en particulier sur la résurgence du nationalisme arabe et sur la mise en place des Lois de Nationalisation. Ces analyses omettent les classes populaires et moyennes grecques, qui, restées en Égypte, ont évolué socialement. En outre, cette mobilité sociale remet en question la construction d'un État postcolonial Égyptien, qui soit socialement et économiquement homogène.

Mots clefs : Mobilité sociale, présence, narration, mémoire, diaspora grecque, Égypte

Introduction

The Greek community had an active social and economic presence in Egypt since the 19th c. The favorable policy of Muhammad Ali, who ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848 during the Ottoman Empire, encouraged Europeans to settle in Egypt and gain privileges and protection from his policies. In order to establish trade with Europe, he called upon European and Levantine merchants to establish their businesses in Egypt[1]. The cotton boom that took place in the 1860s increased immigration from Europe to Egypt, with Greeks being the largest foreign group (Kitroeff, 1989: 12). In addition, important public works, such as the opening of the Suez Canal in 1858[2], and the privilege afforded to foreigners of British colonialism and the Capitulations were other influential factors in the arrival of the Greeks. Over the years, the Greek inhabitants of Egypt evolved from a merchant community into a more socially stratified ethnic minority (Kitroeff, 1989: 7). As Alexander Kitroeff states, they were employed in a variety of sectors, and represented in all classes of society (1989: 31). However, their presence started to gradually decrease in the 1930s and led to several waves of departure. This departure reached its peak in the years of 1961-1962, linked to the Nationalization Laws of 1961[3].

The presence of the Greek community after the 1960s is largely absent in the Greek and Egyptian historical narratives. The Egyptian historiography describes the lives of the Greeks in Egypt until the mid-1950s with nostalgic colors (Ahmad, 1982; Ashmawy, 1997). The Greek is portrayed either as a hero who defends Egyptian interests, or as a greedy usurer who victimizes Egyptian peasants (Abdulhaq, 2016: 12). After the 1950s the Egyptian national narrative emphasizes the Arab nation and Arab unity in the construction of a homogeneous social and economic post-colonial Egyptian state. With the 1956 constitution, the Egyptian

---

1 He also called upon foreign agricultural experts, factory managers and skilled workers. (Karanasou, 1999: 25).

2 The actual opening of the Suez Canal took place in 1869. However, the set up of the company for its construction started in 1858, and the constructions began next year.

3 Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second president of Egypt, pushed through the Socialist Nationalization Law, and it was passed on July 25, 1961. Nasser issued a wide range of socialist resolutions in his attempt to establish a socialist system. One of his measures was Law 117, which nationalized the remaining banks and companies in addition to other major institutions as well. Law 118 provided for the nationalization of eighty-three establishments by 50%. The new land reform Law 127 limited agricultural land ownership to one hundred *feddans* per family (Sakkas, 2009: 110).

state stressed being an Arab country, openly claiming a different cultural orientation from the past (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013: 291). The Greek inhabitants, as part of the "Egyptianized" foreigners or *mutamassirun*, are excluded from the mainstream historiography, having no place in the Egyptian national community (Gorman, 2003: 174). This denial in historical literature, together with socioeconomic policies during Gamal Abdel Nasser's period, reinforces the Egyptian national narrative of only the Egyptian community belonging to the nation in the process of nation-building. In contrast, the Greek national narrative demarcates how a diasporic community could represent the nation beyond its "borders" by exposing two interrelated, nostalgic narratives. The ethnocentric narrative emphasizes a superior Greek identity, and the cosmopolitan one stresses the economic vigor of the community, the loss of privileges, and the economic decline that came with the 1937 Treaty of Montreux and the end of the Capitulations. Nostalgia here refers to a loss of a tolerant past, a mourning of cosmopolitanism and grief regarding contemporary society, as described by Will Hanley (2008: 1346).

This paper focuses on the social and economic presence of the Greek inhabitants who decided to remain in Egypt after 1961. It particularly explores the socioeconomic mobility of the lower and middle-class Greeks during a period of economic and social reform under Gamal Abdel Nasser until the introduction of the *infitah* policies by Anwar Sadat in 1976[4]. Moving away from the narratives of Greek-Egyptian departure, and its subsequent consequences on the nation, this paper attempts to explore notions of foreignness and belonging in Egypt after independence. Such analysis will draw upon conceptual understandings of absence and presence, memory studies, and scholarship on post-colonial Egyptian citizenship. Thus, the exploration of the labour practices and the social world of Greek inhabitants in Egypt aim to expand further the academic study of the Modern Greek diaspora, and the historiographies of the making of modern Egypt through an examination of specific localized and economic histories.

The analysis for this paper will utilize Greek and Arabic archival material collated from the Greek Chamber of Commerce and the community's archives in Alexandria and Cairo. This material is coupled with forty interviews conducted with members of the Greek community in these two cities between 2015 and 2016.

I begin this paper with the analysis of how mainstream historical narratives discuss the presence of the Greeks within the confines of the nation. Secondly, I examine the comments of two interviewees, exploring the processes of socioeconomic mobility and its relationship with the state's vision. Thirdly, I explore the Egyptian citizenship law and its varied impact on the Greek community that remained.

---

4 *Infitah* is the period of economic liberalization, introduced by Anwar Sadat, the third president of Egypt after Gamal Abdel Nasser. Sadat liberalized the market, by "opening the door" to private investment, after a period of economic statism (Cammett, Diwan, Richards and Waterbury, 2015: 100).

My analysis here is based on Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory", whereby memory is seen not as a form of competition but as "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (Rothberg, 2009: 3). Thus, memory is embedded in social action and, as such, challenges the narratives of absence and their relevance to national histories. With regards to the terminology, I address the Greeks of Egypt as *Aigyptiotes*, a term commonly used by the people themselves that is conceptually derived from the Arabic term *mutamassirun*, meaning the "Egyptianized foreigners[5]".

Longing for Nostalgia

It is noteworthy that the interest in Greek diaspora is relatively recent[6]. Starting mostly after the 1970s, and partly influenced by Marxist historiography, the emphasis in academic study shifted away from the history of the Greek state towards the history of the Greek communities abroad (Tziovas, 2009: 3). The Greek national historiography, due to nostalgia and nationalist purposes, often portrayed the history of the Greek diasporic communities through a continuous existence in the host countries that goes back in time (Hasiotis, 2006: 13). The word *paroikia*, meaning "community" in ancient Greek, is used to describe these temporary settlements that Greeks had established since ancient times for the purpose of migration and colonization, as the word diaspora demonstrates. These settlements of the old diasporic Greek communities had an ultimate goal to "Hellenize" the place where they settled and build new cities with the values of their own civilization (Hasiotis, 2006: 14). They were able to achieve this goal due to their size as they were usually the majority over the minority of the host country. The new form of *paroikia* that is seen after the 16th c., and in Egypt after the 19th c., is smaller in size and becomes a minority migrant community in the host country, whereby the dynamics are completely different primarily because of the size and divergent historical contexts.

The idea of a continuous existence in the host country, as in the case of the *Aigyptiotes* being located in Alexandria since the Hellenistic period, is reflected in the ethnocentric narrative, which stresses the "symbolic cohesion of ancestral nationality", as Stathis Gourgouris (2005: 389) states. This phenomenon surfaced by the 20th c., when a new cultural "Great Idea" emerged in diasporic Greek communities, creating the idea that Greece exists as a "virtual empire" outside national borders (Tziovas, 2009: 7). This concept reinforces the idea of a defined "imagined community", one that is sovereign even outside national

---

5 As Anthony Gorman (2003: 175) states, the term *mutamassirun* itself has its own political and historical connotations by detaching the foreign communities from the Egyptian society because they were not Egyptians but "Egyptianized".

6 Notably, the *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, the leading journal in the field, started in 1974.

borders (Anderson, 1983: 6), by disconnecting the presence of the community from its historical context and presence in Egyptian society. The narrative here emphasizes the superiority of Greek national identity and minimizes the fact that the *Aigyptiotes* are an integral part of Egyptian society. Hence, this creates individual and communal identities, as well as transnational and emotional ties to the "homeland", because shared cultural values exist between the *paroikia* and the "homeland" (Chatziioannou, 2009: 45). In this narrative, everything seems to belong to a particular past–a past that was a historic continuation of the "Great Idea", and a prosperous community that reflects the strong nation-state of Greece. By confirming and reinforcing national borders, Greeks here have as a mission to "Hellenize" and civilize the East Mediterranean.

An example of this narrative can be drawn from the work of Efthymios Souloyannis on the Greek community in Cairo, in which he mentions:

> The Hellenic *paroikia* was playing an active role both in the society of the country and in its market, as well as in the international market. We could say that it is a historical continuation of the "Great Idea", whereby a different kind of nationalism and patriotism emerged, in relation to the ones in the mainland. (Souloyannis, 2001: 29, my translation)

Souloyannis here stresses the important role of the Greek community in the Egyptian market and society, which also contributed to the economic prosperity of Egypt outside national borders. In a different part of this work, Souloyannis (2001: 31-32) states that what should be kept as a memory is the "best pages of the Hellenic diaspora" meaning the period when the Greeks in Egypt achieved economic and social prosperity. Due to the fact that the Greek communities in Egypt were included in the Greek national objectives until the beginning of the 20th c. as part of the Greek diaspora, the historiography highlights their presence being in support of the "Great Idea", both politically and materially[7]. The domestic problems of the Greek state, such as the defeat in Asia Minor in 1922, led Greek communities in Egypt to become the "helper" for the needy Greeks in Greece. The wealthiest *Aigyptiotes* not only provided the Greek population with financial support[8] but also provided important donations to the Greek state[9]. This economic power and contribution make the Greek presence very evident and important in literature (see, for example, Politis, 1929, 1930; Syndesmos Aigyptioton Ellinon, 1982; Souloyannis, 2001).

The ethnocentric narrative interrelates with the cosmopolitan one, whereby both express a nostalgia for the past. This nostalgia can be seen in the works that expose

---

[7] One of the most important aims of the Greek state for the Greek communities in Egypt was that they be used as the political and economic outpost in the Eastern Mediterranean (Kitroeff, 1989: 144).

[8] Philanthropy among the wealthier Greek-Egyptians involved financial help for the communities and the needy *Aigyptiotes*. Some examples are the Averoph School for Girls in 1897 and the Kaniskerion Orphanage in 1926.

[9] Such as the Archeological Museum (1866) by Eleni Tositsa and the substantial donations for the National Technical University at the end of the 19th c. by Georgios Averoph.

the exceptional economic and social role of the *Aigyptiotes* from the mid to late 19th c. and, hence, their social and economic contribution to the Egyptian state. An important study on the economic history of the *Aigyptiotes* and, in particular, on cotton production is Matoula Tomara-Sideris' *Oi Ellines tou Kairou [The Greeks of Cairo]* (Tomara-Sideris, 2007), where she names the families of the *Aigyptiotes* who were involved in the process of the cotton production. Tomara-Sideris stresses the demographic superiority of these families over other foreign communities, as well as the distinctive role they played and the contribution they made to the economic and social life of both the Greek community and the Egyptian state. Their contribution as merchants and cotton producers from the middle 19th c. until the first quarter of the 20th c. is highly emphasized due to the donations they made to Greek communities in Egypt–namely, hospitals, elderly care homes, schools, and other community institutions. Tomara-Sideris' work not only highlights the economic contribution of the benefactors to the community but also the social and national consciousness they developed. The social consciousness seems to be a shared characteristic among the urban elite benefactors who functioned as "organic cosmopolitan intellectuals of the international bourgeoisie" (Tomara-Sideris, 2007: 85).

The element of "organic cosmopolitanism" developed out of the perception of an ethnic exceptionalism and, hence, a superior position among the *Aigyptiotes*. This perception makes the *Aigyptiotes*, among others, such as Italians, Syrian-Lebanese, Armenians, Jews and Maltese, part of a "cosmopolitan past", presented either as "colorful accessories of an idealized 'cosmopolitan' past or as 'middlemen' or 'agents' of European 'capitalist penetration' ", as Alexander Kazamias (2014: 253) states. Historiography here stresses the cosmopolitan narrative, highlighting the association of foreign communities–in this case, the *Aigyptiotes*–with the colonial past and their particular legal status under the Capitulations (on this point, see Deeb 1978; Ilbert 1996; Ilbert, Yannakakis, and Hassoun, 1997; Hirst and Silk, 2004). As Will Hanley emphasizes, cosmopolitanism focuses on a certain category of foreigners, the wealthy and elite ones, ignoring the "lower-class" of Europeans and Egyptians (2008: 1352). Thus, this romanticization and idealization of multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism ignores the actual historical context, perceiving the foreign communities, again, as a homogenous elite benefitting from the colonial project (Ibrahim, 2015).

By narrating the history of the *Aigyptiotes* until the middle of the 20th c., when the abolition of the Capitulations was implemented (1949) under the Treaty of Montreux (1937), the presence of the *Aigyptiotes* in Egypt holds a temporary limitation. Their existence in the socioeconomic life of Egypt seems to last until the period of the Capitulations when the community was considered a foreign one–a foreign element within Egyptian socioeconomic life. Moreover, this perception assumes that the Capitulations applied to all *Aigyptiotes*, which was not the case. Anthony Gorman (2008: 239) highlights that more than a quarter of the

population held Ottoman nationality, and due to this fact, were exempt from the Capitulations.

This approach simplifies the community's image down to a foreign group that merely arrives, works, and leaves, thus emphasizing only the loss of privileges, where the social and economic boom should be mentioned, praised, and remembered. It does not fit in the years of demographic decline and economic shrinkage in which the presence of the community departs from this past. Additionally, the community here seems to form a guest presence *vis a vis* the legitimate Egyptian host, which becomes the dominant actor in the Egyptian national narrative. As Barnett points out the "otherness" is being constructed along the lines of one being the recipient of hospitality, based on perceptions of absence through distance (2011). Drawing upon the works of Derrida and Levinas, Barnett argues that the concept of hospitality does not simply rest on inclusion or exclusion, but rather it highlights the temporality. Hospitality here includes aspects of migration and citizenship, and goes beyond geographical concerns, by stressing the "temporality of intersubjective relations" (Barnett, 2011: 6). Hence, the concepts of absence and presence raise questions on who is being acknowledged, or in other words, who or what ought to be present (Jones, Robinson and Turner, 2012: 262).

Recent historiography has developed more nuanced approaches, shedding light upon the complexities of class structure, political affiliations, economic developments, and the multiple identities among the *Aigyptiotes* (see, for instance, Kitroeff, 1989; Gorman, 2008; Kazamias, 2014; Dalachanis, 2015; Abdulhaq, 2016). Nevertheless, these historical narrations only go as far as the 1960s, leaving the presence of the *Aigyptiotes* after this period, once again, unexplored.

Displaying the presence

The oral history of the *Aigyptiotes*, as part of the social memory, coexists with the Greek and Egyptian national discourses and correspondingly demarcates the boundaries of who could belong to the nation. The *Aigyptiotes'* oral accounts embody the struggle of remembering the past, providing a specific example of blurred boundaries between history and memory.

Even though the number of *Aigyptiotes* after the 1960s dropped dramatically, a considerable number of people remained, most of whom were only able to acquire Egyptian citizenship in the 1980s. So the questions remain: What made them stay in Egypt and not depart for Greece or other places like the majority of the *Aigyptiotes*? Were there any special ties with the country? Who formed the community after the 1960s? The answers to these questions differ from one person to the next depending on age, family situation during the period of nationalization, and general lifestyle. However, socioeconomic status and profession remained consistent. Hence, my questions are concentrated on the *Aigyptiotes'* type of employment, when and why they decided to stay in Egypt, and their citizenship status.

According to the Greek National Center of Social Research on the issue of the Greeks Abroad (Ethnikon Kentron Koinonikon Ereunon, 1972: 70), *Aigyptiotes* were estimated to be about 17,000 in 1967, as the table below depicts:

Number of Aigyptiotes in Egypt by Year

	1947	**1960**	**1963**	**1967**
Cairo	15,600	13,600	10,000	6,500
Alexandria	30,700	24,600	12,000	8,000
Suez	7,200	6,200	2,100	1,500
Total (including other areas)	57,500	47,700	27,500	17,000

According to the Greek Chamber of Commerce and the community's archive in Cairo, the number of the businesses found in Alexandria was 74 in 1970, and 195 in Cairo in 1976. The number was considerably smaller than the 2,300 shop owners (*ιδιοκτήται καταστημάτων*) registered throughout Egypt in 1950 (Dalachanis, 2015: 129). However, the businesses still expanded in different sectors such as the wine industry, cinemas, printing stores, nightclubs, chemical plant, and others[10]. A common element of these businesses was their size (small- or medium-scale), which became the reason for not being nationalized and, therefore, provided motivation to stay.

The cases I state below are two examples of an upward socioeconomic mobility experienced by some of the Greek inhabitants in Egypt. As such, they demonstrate the refashioning of the relationship between foreigners, citizens, and the Egyptian state that started to take place in the 1960s.

Case I: Stefanos Argyriou, Cairo

"We were the poorest relatives, they did not damage us, and we bloomed during Nasser's period[11]". Argyriou, born in 1956, was a young child when Nasser issued the Nationalization Laws. His first words emphasized his family's poor socioeconomic background and how this became the reason for their stay in Egypt. He then went on to reference his relatives Tsanaklis and Perakos, who were of a rich background, and stressed the fact that they were completely damaged economically because all of their properties were nationalized, something that did not happen to Argyriou and his family. He stated:

> My father had a small dairy company of butter and cheese, and we did not get nationalized because we were not one of those big "capitals". The company existed before Nasser. My father made a smart move and asked for Egyptian citizenship. This was what kept us here and gave me the opportunity to continue his business.

---

10 Information provided by archival material from the Chamber of Commerce in the cities of Alexandria and in Cairo.

11 Interview with Stefanos Argyriou, January 2015, Cairo, Egypt. Unless otherwise stated, all interviews were conducted in Greek and translated into English by the author.

Argyriou narrated that many of his relatives and friends left for Greece during the period of the nationalization, but his father remained. Because his father decided to stay, he was asked by other *Aigyptiotes* who wanted to leave to become the legal guardian of their businesses. Argyriou stressed that it was a great relief for those *Aigyptiotes* that someone could manage their businesses and that the state would not confiscate them. He also recalled an incident he had witnessed as a little kid between a member of the community and his father:

> I was a little child, but I remember it. There was this gentleman–I do not want to reveal his name–who met my dad at Hotel Acropole. He kissed my father's forehead and started to cry, thanking him for the good he did for his family. These were very rough days, very sad ones. (…) He got the citizenship so I could have the right to own the business and not cooperate with any Egyptians and share the business. Otherwise, we would have had to leave. This was a very rare incident. It was almost impossible to get Egyptian citizenship back then.

After applying for Egyptian citizenship around 1960, Argyriou's father successfully obtained it. As Argyriou stated, it was very rare for *Aigyptiotes* to apply for Egyptian citizenship until that moment. Those who were born before the 1960s held a ten-year residence permit, so citizenship was not considered important. Certain issues concerning the residence permit and citizenship will be analyzed further below.

Argyriou's father asked for and obtained citizenship in order to secure his son's future; the political and economic life had started to change in the immediately preceding years. According to Argyriou, the fact that they obtained citizenship and that the company did not get nationalized were the main reasons for the family's stay in Egypt. During Nasser's period, the import of products was not allowed, and in the specific case of Argyriou, the import of butter and other dairy products was banned. During this period, Argyriou's family became the sole producer and supplier of dairy products to the army and the state. This situation was a turning point for the business because, from a small production unit, the business expanded and Argyriou's family became the main supplier in the country.

Case II: Spyros and Paris Makris, Alexandria

"My father was a grocery merchant. During the nationalization period, the Egyptian government did not damage us. They did not even notice us[12]". Makris was born in 1921 in Alexandria, Egypt. His father was a trader of groceries and had an office for merchant duties. Makris continued his father's business and decided to set up a water glass and silicone factory in 1952, which was the first factory of its kind.

---

12 Interview with Spyros and Paris Makris, January 2016, Alexandria, Egypt.

> Back then, Nasser was building the Aswan Dam. The material we were producing was used in the construction business for the hardening of soil. The Soviets, who were helping Nasser to build the Dam, needed this material, so they asked me to provide them with it.

As stated above, the material that Makris was producing was much needed. During the period of Nasser, one could not import a finished product from outside the country, only the raw materials for industries (Cammett, Diwan, Richards and Waterbury, 2015: 240).

Makris was one of the few who asked for Egyptian citizenship and obtained it before 1952. Egyptian citizenship enabled him to start a factory during the Nasser period. The factory was in its start-up phase when the Nationalization Laws came into effect and was not nationalized due to its size. Makris' son, Paris, who currently owns the factory stated:

> In my opinion, besides the fact that the factory was small, Nasser did not nationalize us because he needed what we were producing. The factory was unique of its kind. The first factories that started to compete with us were founded after the 1980s with the *infitah*. So until that moment, we were the only ones in the market.

On the economic level, the Egyptian state began its first five-year industrial plan in 1957, with the main focus on state enterprise. Until the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company in 1956, the Egyptian state had promoted public-sector growth to either help the private sector or finance the projects that the private sector could not undertake (Cammett, Diwan, Richards and Waterbury, 2015: 241). From 1957 onwards, Nasser emphasized state enterprise, and entire "strategic" sectors, such as chemicals, metals, and minerals, were reserved exclusively for the state. With the Socialist Laws of 1961, Nasser nationalized, among other things, large-scale industry, banking, and foreign trade (Cammett, Diwan, Richards and Waterbury, 2015: 242). The state-led economy of Egypt was now strongly characterized by self-sufficiency in goods for the state and the army. The participation and, hence, mobility in the Egyptian market of the two cases outlined above comply with the decisions and decrees of the Egyptian state at the time. The first case provides efficiency to the state and the army by producing a primary product as a dairy company, and the second is part of a strategic sector–that of chemicals and metals. The water glass and silicone Makris produced coincided with the building of the Aswan Dam and Nasser's desire to increase hydropower generation and supply the agricultural sector with irrigation water. These two cases achieved even more economic success during the period of Anwar Sadat and his policy of economic liberalization in which he stimulated investment in the private sector and attracted foreign investment (Cammett, Diwan, Richards and Waterbury, 2015: 242).

Refashioning the relations of the state and its citizens

The examples of Makris and Argyriou, even though individual cases, embody a collective, social past since they function in particular social frameworks. Their presence here, as explored through their socioeconomic activities, emerges in relation to the departure of other *Aigyptiotes* and the formation of the new postcolonial Egyptian state. The lived experience of leaving and remaining were interlinked, having significant impact on the process of socioeconomic mobility in postcolonial Egypt. The memory of presence here does not contradict the absence even though the community lacks representation in the historiography and space in social memory. The absence and presence co-exist simultaneously. Their presence is silent and unspoken. Hence, the memory of presence and absence come into a dialectic relation, one reinforcing the other (Rothberg, 2009).

The participation of Makris and Argyriou's families in Egyptian society highlights the performative discourse of a "foreigner" turning into a "national" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2000: 177), through their socioeconomic engagement with the state. That is, one changes from being a foreigner to being a citizen due to the acquisition of Egyptian citizenship, which refashions the relationship between the state, the citizens, and the nation. The structure of social relations in Egypt changed in the process of decolonization. Until the 1950s, land was the basis of wealth, and upward social mobility was limited to landowners and the western-educated professionals (Mondal, 2003: 146). The end of colonialism demarcated the need for redistribution of national wealth in order to eliminate feudalism. Thus, Nasser redistributed land approximately to 350,000 families in order to alter the big inequalities in land ownership and grant social mobility to the poorer strata of the population (Hanieh, 2013: 77).

In this process of decolonization and nation-building, a simultaneous inclusion and exclusion in state-society relations took place. As Sinem Adar highlights, the modes of inclusion and exclusion should be understood in relation to the transition that arose in society "from imperial subject-hood to national citizenship" (2016: 138). The new legislation on citizenship introduced by Nasser was aiming to secure the Egyptian community, and the attachment to Egypt (Parolin, 2009: 81). Due to the anti-imperial and anti-colonial feelings of that period, the process of naturalization of a foreigner to an Egyptian national started to become more complicated. Consequently, Law 12/1929, which granted Egyptian nationality to those who had a common cultural, linguistic or religious background, and were already assimilated to Egyptian society (Parolin, 2009: 81), was replaced with the new Law 160/1950. This new Law 160/1950 was based on the right of blood (*jus sanguinis*) and the right of soil (j*us soli*) and made the naturalization process no longer automatic. It stipulated that a foreigner who was born in Egypt could apply and obtain citizenship only if the Ministerial Council agreed that the person met certain criteria, which included knowledge of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, even if the person had acquired citizenship, s/he was required to wait approximately

five years until s/he could have access to all the sociopolitical rights enjoyed by Egyptians at the time (Dalachanis, 2015: 150-151).

The refashioning of the relationship between foreigners, citizens, and the Egyptian state was further complicated with the laws of 1956, whereby a foreigner could no longer hold a ten-year work or residence permit. From that year onward, residence and work permits were limited to one year. This change meant restrictions in the job market and possibly unemployment for *Aigyptiotes* who were born after 1956 and consequently could only obtain a one-year permit[13].

Citizenship, as well as residence and work permits, reconstructs the relationships among the *Aigyptiotes* and their relationship *vis a vis* the state. As two of the exceptions who acquired Egyptian citizenship, Argyriou and Makris expose the complexities around work and residence permits. Hence, they highlight the crucial role of citizenship, which demarcates the socioeconomic mobility one could have in the process of the Egyptian nation-building.

Conclusion

In this paper, I analyze the social and economic presence of *Aigyptiotes* who stayed in Egypt after 1961 through the productive dialectic relation of absence and presence. The concepts of absence and presence here are not contradictory but coexistent, and as such, raise questions regarding who ought to be acknowledged by the state, and in historical literature. Based on my analysis on Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory", I approach memory as embedded in social action that challenges the narratives of absence and presence found in national historiographies.

The two interviews presented in the paper attempt to provide new understandings of the history of the *Aigyptiotes* by recounting narratives of presence. These accounts challenge the historical amnesia and break the boundaries between history and memory so deeply embedded in dominant Greek and Egyptian narratives. For the Greek national narrative, the past of the *Aigyptiotes* is a past of winners, emphasizing the struggle for recognition in collective memory. The Egyptian national narrative, however, attempts to assert the specificity of the Egyptian nation in the post-colonial period in which boundaries had to be defined. Hence, the discourse of uniqueness is stressed in both national narratives, eliminating space for other memories.

In considering the factor of citizenship, I touch upon the notions of foreignness and belonging. Being an Egyptian citizen of Greek extraction complicates broad, generalizing notions of who belongs in Egypt. The new political category of the Egyptian citizen that emerged after 1922, and the abolition of the Capitulations

---

13 Some of the interviewees were very young when the law applied, so it did not affect them. However, they argued that if the law was applicable to them, they would have considered the departure.

in 1937, brought to the fore questions of foreignness and belonging concerning the *Aigyptiotes* and other *mutamassirun*. The consistency and social stratification of the *Aigyptiotes* and other *mutamassir* communities, like the Jews and Italians, differed from the colonial presence of the British or French elite. Nevertheless, the *mutamassir* communities also became a part of broader political and economic developments in the MENA and in Egypt in particular, with significant impact from the Second World War and anti-semitism (Beinin, 1998; Dalachanis, 2015; Gorman, 2015; Abdulhaq, 2016). Labour opportunities arose for those who stayed after the 1960s due to the vacuum that the departure of others had left. Thus, the labour practices and social life of the *Aigyptiotes*, as the largest *mutamassir* community in post-colonial Egypt, contributes to the exploration of new histories and understandings of social and economic life in Egypt.

The two cases stated in the paper express their own socioeconomic mobility because they become part of the refashioning of Egypt as imagined and propagated by Nasser. In further consideration of the status of *Aigyptiotes* and other communities in Egypt, one might ask how the presence of these groups causes us to reconsider notions of nationality, belonging, and origins. Furthermore, what elements of identity and belonging must be promoted and suppressed in order to allow for official narratives to gain traction among a wider public and thus, become established as the dominant criteria for what constitutes the "proper" inhabitants of Egypt?

Bibliography

ABDULHAQ Najat, 2016, *Jewish and Greek Communities in Egypt, Entrepreneurship and Business before Nasser*, London, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd.

ADAR Sinem, 2016, « Regimes of Political Belonging: Turkey and Egypt in Comparative Perspective » in Nicole Stokes-DuPass and Ramona Fruja (ed.) *Citizenship, Belonging, and Nation-States in the Twenty-First Century*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

AHMAD Nabil Sayid, 1982, *Al-nashat al-iqtisadi lil-ajanib wa atharuhu fil-mujtama al-misri min 1922-1952*, Cairo, al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-Amma lil-Kitab.

ANDERSON Benedict, 1983, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso.

ASHMAWY Sayid, 1997, *Al-Yunaniyyun fi Misr 1805-1956*, Cairo, Ein.

BARNETT Clive, 2011, « Ways of Relating: Hospitality and the Acknowledgement of Otherness », *Progress in Human Geography*, 29:1, p. 5-21.

BEININ, Joel, 1998, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press.

BOURDIEU Pierre and WACQUANT Loïc, 2000, *The Organic Ethnologist of Algerian Migration*, London, Sage.

CAMMETT Melani, DIWAN Ishac, RICHARDS Alan and WATERBURY John, 2015, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, Boulder, Westview Press.

CHATZIIOANNOU Maria Christina, 2009, « Greek Merchants in Victorian England » in Dimitris Tziovas (ed.), *Greek Diaspora and Migration Since 1700: Society, Politics and Culture*, Farnham, Ashgate.

CLEVELAND William and BUNTON Martin, 2013, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Boulder, Westview Press.

DALACHANIS Angelos, 2015, *Akiverniti Paroikia: Oi Ellines stin Aigypto. Apo tin katargisi ton pronomion stin exodo, 1937-1962*, Irakleio, Panepistimiakes Ekdoseis Kritis.

DEEB Marius, 1978, « The Socioeconomic Role of the Local Foreign Minorities in Modern Egypt, 1805-1961 », *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9.

ETHNIKON KENTRON KOINONIKON EREUNON, 1972, *Apodimoi Ellines-Greeks Abroad*, Athina, Ethnikon Kentron Koinonikon Ereunon.

GORMAN Anthony, 2003, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation*, London, Routledge.

—, 2008, « Foreign Workers in Egypt, 1882-1914. Subaltern or Labour Elite? », in Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Subalterns and Social Protest. History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa*, New York, Routledge.

—, 2015, « The Italians of Egypt: Return to Diaspora » in Anthony Gorman and Sossie Kasbarian (ed.), *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualizing Community*, Edinburgh, Edinburg University Press.

GOURGOURIS Stathis, 2005, « Concept of 'Diaspora' in Contemporary World » in Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis, Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglou (ed.), *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History*, Oxford, Berg.

HANIEH Adam, 2013, *Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East*, Chicago, Haymarket Books.

HANLEY Will, 2008, « Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies », *History Compass* 6: 5, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, p. 1346-1367, DOI:10.1111/j.1478-0542.2008.00545.x.

HASIOTIS Ioannis, 2006, *Oi Ellines sti Diaspora, 15th c.-21th c.*, Athens, Greek Parliament.

HIRST Anthony and SILK Michael, 2004, *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*, London, Ashgate.

IBRAHIM Vivian, 2015, « Beyond the Cross and the Crescent: Plural Identities and the Copts in Contemporary Egypt », *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38:14, p. 2584-2597, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2015.1061138.

ILBERT Robert, 1996, *Alexandrie, 1830-1930: histoire d'une communauté citadine*, Le Caire, Institut français d'archéologie orientale.

ILBERT Robert, YANNAKAKIS Ilio and HASSOUN Jacques (eds), 1997, *Alexandria 1860-1960: The Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria, Harpocrates.

JONES Rhys Dafydd, ROBINSON James and TURNER Jennifer, 2012, « Introduction. Between Absence and Presence: Geographies of Hiding, Invisibility and Silence », *Space and Polity*, 16:3, p. 257-263, DOI: 10.1080/13562576.2012.733567

KARANASOU Floresca, 1999, « The Greeks in Egypt: from Mohammed Ali to Nasser, 1805-1961 » in Richard Clogg (ed.), *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, London, Macmillan.

KAZAMIAS Alexander, 2014, « Cromer's Assault on 'Internationalism': British Colonialism and the Greeks of Egypt 1882-1907 » in M. Booth and A. Gorman (ed.), *The long 1890s in Egypt, Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance*, Edinburg, Edinburg University Press.

KITROEFF Alexander, 1989, *The Greeks in Egypt 1919-1937: Ethnicity and Class*, London, Ithaca.

MONDAL A. Anshuman, 2003, *Nationalism and Post-Colonial Identity: Culture and Ideology in India and Egypt*, London, Routledge.

PAROLIN P. Gianluca, 2009, *Citizenship in the Arab World. Kin, Religion and Nation-State*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press.

POLITIS Athanaese G., 1929, 1930, *L'Hellénisme et l'Égypte moderne*, vol. I, vol. II., Paris, Alcan.

ROTHBERG Michael, 2009, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, Stanford*, Stanford University Press.

SAKKAS John, 2009, « Greece and the Mass Exodus of the Egyptian Greeks, 1956-1966 », *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Special Issue, 35:2, p. 101-115.

SOULOYANNIS Efthymios, 2001, *I Elliniki koinotita tou Kairou*, Athens, Kontinos Publications.

SYNDESMOS AIGYPTIOTON ELLINON, 1982, *I Ellines stin Aigypto, 4.000 chronia parousia*, Athina, Syndesmos Aigyptioton Ellinon.

TOMARA-SIDERIS Matoula, 2007, *Oi Ellines tou Kairou*, Athens, Kerkyra-Economia Publishing.

TZIOVAS Dimitris, 2009, *Greek Diaspora and Migration Since 1700: Society, Politics and Culture*, Farnham, Ashgate.