Greeks in Egypt: negotiating presence, identity and belonging after the 1960s

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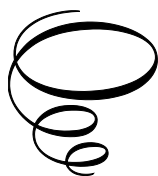
Cultural Exchanges in the Eastern Mediterranean:

Asia Minor, Cyprus and Egypt

Edited by

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GREEKS IN EGYPT: NEGOTIATING PRESENCE, IDENTITY AND BELONGING AFTER THE 1960S

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Abstract

The presence of the Greek community in Egypt is largely absent in the Greek and Egyptian historical narratives after the departure en masse in the early years of the 1960s. This chapter examines the reasons and motivations of Greeks who stayed in Egypt and explores the new meanings and environments the notion of 'crisis' produced for them. Thus, it asks: what made Greeks stay on an individual level and what 'adjustment' policies were taken on an institutional level for those who remained? Moreover, it investigates which opportunities and obstacles Greeks encountered and how these shaped their notions of belonging and home. Through archival material and oral accounts that I conducted with Greek inhabitants mainly in Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt, I trace links, tensions and ruptures between ideas of longing and belonging in Greece and Egypt. Through these accounts, I explore how Greeks negotiated, in mind and practice, belonging and space as transnational agents. How were mobilities performed and mediated, and what kind of emotions were unpacked while performing acts of diasporic belonging?

Introduction

As Avtar Brah has noted, the desire for 'home' is embedded in diasporic bodies.[1] He elaborates on the notion of home or the homing desire by saying that it is fundamentally connected with how 'processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given

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[1] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 189.

circumstances.' [2] These processes of inclusion or exclusion operate as personal or political struggles of 'belonging' in the search for home. [3]

Greeks' experiences and how they have performed belonging emotionally and in practice have been shaped by the opportunities and obstacles they have encountered while navigating Egyptian society, but also while they were engaging in transnational experiences between Greece and Egypt. In this chapter, I discuss some of the reasons underlying the Greeks' stay in Egypt and how their lives evolved after a majority of them departed from the country in the early 1960s.

The 'crisis' and departures among the Greek inhabitants in the early 1960s were not a new phenomenon. Studies have shown how certain social, economic, and political transformations that took place in Egypt from the 1930s had a significant impact on Greek and other foreign communities in Egypt, such as the Italians. [4] The formation of the Egyptian nation-state and new socioeconomic policies (such as the end of the Capitulations [5]) marked a new reality, with the colonial era—which

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[2] The *homing desire* is a term Avtar Brah has used in his work to describe the tensions that emerge between discourses of 'home' and 'dispersion' when discussing the concept of diaspora and diasporic bodies. See Brah, *Cartographies*, 189.

[3] Brah, *Cartographies*, 189.

[4] On Greeks in Egypt, see, for example, Alexander Kitroeff, *The Greeks and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2019); Angelos Dalachanis, *The Greek Exodus from Egypt: Diaspora Politics and Emigration: 1937–1962* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017); Alexander Kazamias, "The 'Purge of the Greeks' from Nasserite Egypt: Myths and Realities," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora,* Special Issue, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2009): 13–34; Sophianos Chryssostomidis, "The Left, Nasser, and the Exodus of the Greeks from Egypt," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Special Issue, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2009): 155–159; Alexander Kitroeff, *The Greeks in Egypt 1919–1937: Ethnicity and Class* (London: Ithaca Press, 1989). On the Italians in Egypt, see for example, Joseph John Viscomi, "Mediterranean Futures: Historical Time and the Departure of Italians from Egypt, 1919–1937," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 91, No. 6 (2019): 341–379; Antony Gorman, "The Italians of Egypt: Return to Diaspora." In *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualizing Community*, eds. Anthony Gorman and Sossie Kasbarian (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)138–170.

[5] The Capitulations (*al-Imtiyāzāt* in Arabic, which translates to 'privileges') were bilateral agreements between the Ottoman Empire and European city-states. They regulated the status of nationals of these European city-states on Ottoman territory, granted them privileges, and encouraged commercial exchanges. The Capitulations

represented Egypt's exploitation—being relegated to the past. Therefore, any modes of exclusion or inclusion that arose in society were part of the transition 'from imperial subject-hood to national citizenship'.[6]

Even though the number of Greeks living in Egypt declined dramatically after the 1960s, and although a tumultuous period, a considerable number remained. Therefore, since the presence of the Greek community after this period is largely absent in the Greek and Egyptian historical narratives, I attempt to explore the lives and multiple histories of those Greeks who remained in Egypt and the new meanings and environments that the notion of 'crisis' produced for them, on an individual and institutional level. Furthermore, by discussing some of their stories of staying, I explore which reasons became markers of belonging for them in Egypt and thus, anchored their stay there. Very often, their stories of staying were narrated next to stories of departure, highlighting their determination and agency in negotiating their presence in Egypt and demonstrating how a stay was more beneficial to them than any departure. Thus, this chapter navigates how Greeks negotiated their stay and presence, both in mind and practice.

The analysis of this chapter is based on both archival material I collated from different institutions in Greece and Egypt and interviews I conducted with Greek residents of Egypt. My interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire with both open and closed questions. This allowed the interviewees the space to share a range of feelings and reflections on different aspects of their life in Egypt. In order to diversify my material, I collected interviews from 15 women and 21 men born between the late 1920s and the late 1960s. The interviewees also differed in socioeconomic status, profession, political viewpoints and origins. This diversity means my analysis also attempts to expose the non-homogeneity of the Greek community by depicting multiple and diverse voices and lives.

The Greeks I interviewed all had migrant backgrounds, as their ancestors had come to Egypt for economic reasons from different parts of the Ottoman Empire or the newly founded state of Greece in the middle or late nineteenth century. Protection and privileges extended by Muhammad

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were abolished with the Treaty of Montreux in 1937, but due to a twelve-year period of transition, they remained intact until 1949.

[6] Sinem Adar, "Regimes of Political Belonging: Turkey and Egypt in Comparative Perspective," In *Citizenship, Belonging, and Nation-States in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Nicole Stokes-DuPass and Ramona Fruja (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 138.

Ali, the ruler of Egypt from 1805 to 1848, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1858, and the cotton boom in the 1860s were some of the reasons that attracted foreigners (among them Greeks) to migrate to Egypt. In addition, the British colonial presence after 1882 and the Capitulations that granted certain privileges to foreigners were influential in promoting migration to Egypt.

My interviewees, mostly second or third generation migrants, continue to be connected to Greece, embarking on short visits, even if their ancestors came from different parts of the empire. These visits—which relate in most cases to leisure, consumption, education or investments in Greece—afford them a certain type of mobility and thus scope to negotiate their presence on a transnational level and within the Egyptian social structure. Hence, they are simultaneously mobile and rooted. For these reasons, the interviews enable me to investigate how concepts of mobility and rootedness are expressed and what they entail for Greeks in Egypt.

Ministerial Decree 263/1960 and the Crisis of the Early 1960s

Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second president of Egypt, implemented a series of socialist laws when he came to power, which affected both Egyptians and foreigners regarding their labour activities.[7] These laws not only affected the wealthy population of Egypt, whose property was nationalized, but also had a great impact on white-collar workers, employees of such companies, and the Greek community in general, arousing a general feeling of insecurity concerning their future in Egypt.

In October 1960, Alexander Kazoulis and Giagkos Chryssovergis, the President and the General Secretary of the Greek Chamber of Commerce in Alexandria (GCCA), respectively, addressed the concerns

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[7] On 25 July 1961, Gamal Abdel Nasser implemented nationalization laws, which came in the wake of the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. Until then, the Egyptian state had promoted public-sector growth either to help the private sector or to finance the projects that the private sector could not undertake. 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 industries, banking, and foreign trade in his attempt to promote a state-led economy, which was strongly characterized by self-sufficiency in goods for the state and the army. See Dalachanis, *The Greek Exodus*, 207–208.

around foreigners' employment [8] to the representative of the Greek Chamber of Commerce (GCC) in Athens, P. Mamopoulos. The issue at hand was the new decree 263/1960 that was scheduled to come into effect in November of that year.[9]

The decree, introduced by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, Tawfek Abdel Fatah, comprised 20 articles concerning the employment of foreigners in Egypt.[10] Article 5, which the representatives of the GCCA addressed to Mamopoulos, was the most crucial in specifying the terms of the new regulations. It stated that all foreign workers and employees could obtain work permits once they complied with certain conditions approved by the National Department of Labour. The article also stipulated that work permits would be assigned to foreigners depending on the needs of the public sector; the non-competition foreigners showed towards the Egyptian labour force; the condition that the share of foreigner workers in a business should not exceed 15 per cent of the total staff; and that their salaries should not exceed 25 per cent of the total payroll of the business.

Article 5 was modified by Article 2, which essentially exempted businesses with five or fewer employees from the decree and its aforementioned conditions.[11] This meant that the small and medium-sized businesses that many Greeks and others operated at the time had more space and flexibility to function in the post-colonial Egyptian society and market.[12] Even though there were certain exceptions to those rules, there was a general feeling of having no future in Egypt. According to Kazoulis

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[8] Letter from Alexander Kazoulis and Giagkos Chryssovergis to Mamopoulos. Number 165/60, noted as 'extremely urgent', 24 October 1960, Chambre de Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

[9] Article 8, Ministerial Decree No. 288/14-11-1960 of the Decree 263/1960, Chambre de Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

[10] Ministerial Decree No. 288/14-11-1960 of the Decree 263/1960, Chambre de Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

[11] Article 2 Ministerial Decree No. 288/14-11-1960 of the Decree 263/1960, Chambre de Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

[12] The decree did not apply to those foreigners who worked for the government or public sector, those falling under special bilateral agreements between the UAR (United Arab Republic) and certain foreign countries, or those holding diplomatic or other special passports.

and Chryssovergis, this new law would be the 'last straw' [13] for the
47,673[14] remaining Greeks of Egypt. They stated:

> Dear Mr Mamopoulos, […] As of last Thursday, the 20th of this current
> month, when the above-mentioned Law was published in the press, all
> the Greeks in Egypt, regardless of class or occupation, are in a PANIC,
> since it was determined the number of foreigners in any type of business
> cannot exceed 15 per cent of the total number of employees. This is a
> complete extermination targeting Greeks (given other foreigners have
> already left the country), with many of them likely to be fired and some
> of our businesses to be shuttered.[15]

The way the word 'PANIC' was fully capitalized in the letter is telling,
reflecting the alarm that had overwhelmed Greeks who, regardless of class
and occupation, would be led into calamity due to the 15 per cent cap on
foreigners working in any kind of business in Egypt. It was further added
that there were no other foreigners left in the country, but Greeks, stressing
how the new decree primarily affected the nearly 50,000 who continued to
reside in Egypt.

Another passage in the letter noted that existing residence permits
were virtually worthless since they could no longer secure the position of
Greeks in the Egyptian labour market. With earlier labour market reforms
introduced in 1956, the authorities ceased issuing ten-year work and
residence permits and instead offered a one-year document that had to be
renewed annually (and was not automatic). In addition, even those who
had obtained a ten-year residence permit earlier than 1956 had to apply

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[13] They used the term *charistiki voli* in Greek. Letter from Alexander Kazoulis and
Giagkos Chryssovergis to Mamopoulos. Number 165/60, noted as 'extremely
urgent', 24 October 1960, Chambre de Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie,
Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

[14] This is the number for 1960 according to official Egyptian statistics. See General
Population Census of Egypt, Cairo, 1960. However, Kazoulis and Chryssovergis
stated in the letter that Greeks at that time numbered about 60,000 people. See
Letter from Alexander Kazoulis and Giagkos Chryssovergis to Mamopoulos.
Number 165/60, noted as 'extremely urgent', 24 October 1960, Chambre de
Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

[15] Letter from Alexander Kazoulis and Giagkos Chryssovergis to Mamopoulos.
No. 165/60, noted as 'extremely urgent', 24 October 1960, Chambre de Commerce
Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

and obtain a one-year work permit.[16]

Officials of the GCCA referred to this particular change to residence permits as no longer having any use. Further along in the letter, they requested that a minister from Greece visit Egypt and discuss these issues with his Egyptian counterpart in person, as they believed that pressure from the local community's institutions or the Greek diplomatic body in Egypt was insufficient to solve the situation, exacerbating the pervasive feeling of panic among the Greek-Egyptian diaspora.

The techniques of ordering and classification were highlighted here, with economic and nationalist policies to define a new national, spatial body. The classifications were conceived in their national spatial body, and hence the question raised was how this national space should look and who could be a part of it. As Ghassan Hage has noted: '"Too many" cannot be conceived outside of a definite national space against which it obtains its significance, yet neither can it be conceived except against a desired national space where there aren't "too many".'[17] Thus, what was being preserved was the relation between the 'race' or 'ethnicity' with an imagined national space, where these categories of spatial management could take place.[18]

A passage in an article from the newspaper *Tachydromos* further highlighted the temporality and fragmentation of foreigners' position in the labour market. The article stated:

> We need to explain here that the 'temporary' status provided to the holder of 'a ten-year permit' renders him immobile in his work environment and s t a t i c [*sic*]. It means he is unable to develop any kind of economic or other activity, which is not in the best interests of the country's economy.[19]

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[16] Article 8 referred to those foreigners who had obtained a ten- or five-year residence permit. They, and the one-year permit holders, had to renew their permits a month prior to expiration day. Article 8, Ministerial Decree No. 288/14-11-1960 of the Decree 263/1960, Chambre de Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

[17] Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 39.

[18] Hage, *White Nation*, 38.

[19] "H Ergasia ton Xenon" [Foreigners' Employment], *Tachydromos* newspaper, 22 October 1960. Chambre de Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

The way the word 'static' was drawn out in this passage reveals that the author of the article thought that the limitations of the restrictive permit were serious. Besides the fact that the new rules would severely curtail the kinds of professions foreigners could pursue, they would also restrict foreigners to jobs within their assigned regions of residence. In effect, as the article noted, whereas before they had been able to access the labour market on equal terms with Egyptian citizens, the *mutamassirun*[20] were now being relegated to 'guests' under the custodianship of the 'host' Egyptian state.[21]

Chrysovergis warned the ambassador that if no solution were found concerning the employment of foreigners, the only answer would be repatriation. The importance of Egyptian citizenship was highlighted at the end of another document, where it was stated that Greek employers were still recruiting Greek employees (*omogeneis*) on the condition that they held Egyptian citizenship.[22] This element stressed once more the closed ethnic network in which some Greek businesses operated. This network continued after the population exodus in the early 1960s, expressing solidarity among those who remained. However, this time a new condition was added—the acquisition of Egyptian citizenship.

Decree 263/1960 triggered feelings of pessimism and anxiety among members of the community; departures accelerated in the final months of 1960. Greeks left in even greater numbers in 1961 when the nationalization laws were implemented, reaching their peak in 1962. According to the Greek National Centre of Social Research on the issue of

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[20] *Mutamassirun* (in plural) means Egyptianized foreigners. As Anthony Gorman has stated, the term *mutamassirun* itself has its own political and historical connotations by detaching the foreign communities from Egyptian society on the grounds they were not Egyptians but instead 'Egyptianized'. See Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (London: Routledge, 2003), 175.

[21] According to Clive Barnett, 'Otherness' is strongly linked to concepts of hospitality and who is eligible to receive it. The concept of hospitality does not merely refer to exclusion or inclusion, but rather illustrates temporality. See Clive Barnett, "Ways of Relating: Hospitality and the Acknowledgement of Otherness," *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2011): 6. On the delineation of the Greek community in Egypt as guests, see also Eftychia Mylona, "A Presence Without a Narrative: The Greeks in Egypt, 1961–1976," *Revue des Monde Musulmanes et de la Mediterranee*, Vol. 144 (2018): 181.

[22] Document dated 24 April 1962, File: *Correspondence 1960–1963*, Chambre de Commerce Hellenique D'Alexandrie, Archeio Emporikou Epimelitiriou Alexandreias.

the Greeks Abroad,[23] Greeks were estimated at around 17,000 in 1967, as the table depicts:

Table 6.1 Number of Greeks Living 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

Source: Greek National Centre of Social Research on the Greeks Abroad.

The early 1960s mass departure characterized a period of transition and demarcated one more space of 'rupture' in the context of departures and a protracted crisis experienced by the Greek community after the 1930s. The Egyptianization laws of 1957, the socialist laws at the beginning of 1959, and the nationalization laws of 1961 were not the only reasons propelling the Greeks' departure. Nevertheless, they did act as transformative events. They characterized this last phase of 'crisis' that created a qualitative change in the composition of the Greek community, with two-thirds of Greeks having left by 1967.

As mentioned, the 'PANIC' in the letter addressed to the GCC in Athens did not merely refer to the position of Greeks in the labour market but also their life after this rupture. Discussions on 'readjustment' came again to the fore in order to find solutions for Greeks during this period of transition. The issue of 'readjustment' was very much present, especially among leftist voices of the community[24] since the new economic and

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[23] *Apodimoi Ellines* [Greeks Abroad] (Athens: Ethnikon Kentron Koinonikon Ereunon, 1972), 70.
[24] On this matter, see Sophianos Chryssostomidis, "Elliniki paroikia Aigyptou: I Exodos" [The Greek Community in Egypt: The Exodus], *Archeiotaxio 4*, Vol. 130,

political realities after the end of the Capitulations and the Treaty of Montreux (1937). Considering how panic and crisis were depicted as the norm in archival documents and reflecting on what most of the historiography focuses on when it comes to Greeks in Egypt—for example, its departure—the question that arises is what made Greeks stay on an individual level? More so, what 'adjustment' policies were taken on an institutional level for those who remained?

Aspects of 'Readjustment'

Actions to acquire Egyptian citizenship were taken on an individual basis and never *en masse*. Konstantinos Karamanlis, the prime minister of Greece at that time, had submitted a request for recognition of dual citizenship for Greeks living in Egypt during his visit in 1957. Nevertheless, due to a lack of interest among Greeks in acquiring citizenship *en masse*,[25] and the fact that the Egyptian state did not prioritize the issue, nothing came out of this. Hence, no solution to the unemployment issue materialized.[26] Only in the mid-1980s did some Greeks manage to acquire Egyptian citizenship due to a bilateral agreement between Egypt and Greece. However, as stated by my interviewees, only a small number of people was offered this option.

The restrictions on residence permits affected the younger generation, especially those who, as a result, could not secure work and stay in Egypt. Thus, on a community level, one of the 'readjustment' goals

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No. 7 (May 2002): 117–131; Antony Gorman, "Egypt's Forgotten Communists: The Postwar Greek Left," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Special Issue, Vol. 20, No.1 (2002): 1–27; Sophianos Chryssostomidis, "The Left, Nasser, and the Exodus of the Greeks from Egypt," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Special Issue, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2009): 155–159.

[25] Irakleitos Souyioultzoglou has emphasized in his work the mechanisms of colonization of Greeks' collective memory by the community's institutions. He has stressed how the community's institutions incorporated socially the members of the Greek community but isolated them from the Egyptian environment. Consequently, this created a particular image of a 'Greek' Egypt for the community's members. This perception changed slowly over the years, as Greeks had to adjust to the changing environment. Irakleitos Souyioultzoglou, "I "Elliniki" Aigyptos os Topos Istorias kai Mnimis" [The 'Greek' Egypt as a Place of History and Memory], Unpublished PhD thesis, Athens: Panteion University, 2017.

[26] Dalachanis, *The Greek Exodus,* 100.

taken by the Greek *koinotita*[27] in Cairo was a more technical education that could accommodate better the needs of young people in the labour market. An indication of a new direction by Greeks toward the labour market was the newly established School of Touristic Business (Scholi Touristikon Epaggelmaton).

      Several articles were written to announce the school's opening in the community press.[28] According to the Cairo *koinotita*, in a letter that Nikos Pierrakos, the president of the *koinotita,* addressed to Evangelos Savvopoulos, the Minister of the Presidency of the Government[29] at that time, the establishment of the School of Touristic Business was an attempt to stave off the departure of Greeks from Egypt.[30] The representatives of the Greek *koinotita* stressed in that letter their attempt to keep the Greek population in Egypt, and especially the youth, without triggering a refugee crisis in Greece.[31] Furthermore, they stressed their willingness to fully reorganize all the community's technical schools and create new departments,[32] like the School of Touristic Business, which would start in the new academic year (1966).

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[27] By *koinotita* I refer to the institution of Greeks in Cairo, established in 1856, and not to the Greek inhabitants of Egypt as a whole.

[28] See, for example, articles in the Greek community's newspaper *Fos* from 25 October 1968 and 24 April 1969, file: *Efimerida* "*Fos*," 1968–1984, Archeio Ellinikis Koinotitas Kairou.

[29] Ypourgos tis Proedrias Kyverniseos.

[30] Nikos Pierrakos to Evangelos Savvopoulos, No. 953/673, 28 July 1966, file: *Ekpaideusi/50*, Archeio Ellinikis Koinotitas Kairou.

[31] On the letter, there were implicit references to the refugee crisis and migration waves from Turkey to Greece that took place in the 1920s and 1930s. On this matter, see Dimitris Kamouzis, "Out of Harm's Way? Structural Violence and the Greek Orthodox Community of Istanbul during World War I," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2017): 189–211; Emre Erol, *The Ottoman Crisis in Western Anatolia: Turkey's Belle Époque and the Transition to a Modern Nation State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

[32] Besides the School of Touristic Business, morning and night schools were established in 1966. These included the night schools for architectural design (3 years), the radio and television school (2 years), the department for tailoring women's clothing (2 years), and the department of soldering and oxyacetylene welding (3 months). The morning schools included an engineering school (4 years), a middle technical school for foremen engineers (3 years), and the School for Touristic Business for male and female (2 years). Nikos Pierrakos to Evangelos Savvopoulos, No. 953/673, 28 July 1966, file: *Ekpaideusi/50*, Archeio Ellinikis Koinotitas Kairou.

The language skills[33] Greeks acquired were an asset for tourism businesses, and their willingness toward this field characterized a new orientation in the labour market. According to school registrations in Cairo, only 12 students registered when the school first opened; the number nearly doubled (to 20) the year after, during the academic year 1967–68. At this time, several newspaper articles were advertising the new School of Touristic Business and other newly established departments. Some of them praised the *koinotita* for its effort to adjust to the labour market changes.[34]

Yorgos, one of the Greeks I interviewed in Cairo, studied at the School of Touristic Business and later joined the teaching staff.[35] Born in Cairo in 1950, he held a 10-year residence permit until 1985, when he obtained Egyptian citizenship, similar to other Greeks who obtained it due to the bilateral agreement. This meant that for 35 years, he remained in Egypt with only a permit.[36] After studying at the tourism school in Cairo, he worked in the tourism sector until 1975. Afterwards, he changed jobs and became employed in a multinational company. Yorgos commented, 'I was lucky when it came to work; I was secure. If you are satisfied, home is wherever you are. We never discussed leaving in our home'.

Responses like these, which point to the absence of discussions around departure, often emerged. For example, some of my interviewees commented: 'We never discussed it at home' or 'I never heard my parents talking about leaving'. Such answers motivated me to explore further the personal reasons behind their decision to remain. During the interviews, interviewees recounted reasons related to property, employment, citizenship, financial struggle and studies as to why they chose to stay. These everyday factors and practical reasons often played an important role in remaining, indicating a sentiment among them that they not be left behind. In brief, staying was more beneficial than departing. In the following section, I discuss some of those narratives and explore how property ownership, profession, and citizenship, among other factors, acted as markers of belonging for some Greeks in Egypt.

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[33] Besides the Greek language, Greeks were studying Arabic, French and English at their community schools. Averofeio School, Statuses 1961–1975, Archeio Ellinikis Koinotitas Alexandreias.

[34] See *Fos*, articles 25 October 1968 and 25 April 1969, file: *Efimerida* "*Fos*," 1968–1984, Archeio Ellinikis Koinotitas Kairou.

[35] Interview with the author, January 2016.

[36] Yorgos was born before 1956, so he could obtain a ten-year residence permit, and renew it when needed.

Stories of Remaining

> Those of us who had interests here stayed. It was my decision to leave or
> stay. I decided to stay and manage all my family's property. We had and
> still have a lot of property, such as blocks of flats, land and our
> clothing/novelty store. (Edmondos, born 1938, Alexandria).[37]

Walking down the busy Saad Zaghloul, I came across Edmondos's
two-floor clothing store, Minerva, where I was supposed to have an
interview with him that afternoon. The store was busy, and as I was trying
to find my way, an employee took me to the second floor, where
Edmondos's office was located. We communicated in Greek, and I noticed
his fluency in the language, which possibly pointed to the thorough
education that he and his generation received. After ordering some Arabic
coffee for us, he talked about the photos on the walls, narrating the story of
Minerva. The store has been in operation since 1935 and has been a
landmark for the Greek community in Alexandria, as it is one of the few
Greek stores that has remained open to the current day. Edmondos spoke
with pride about the establishment, reflecting on his and his family's
achievements over the years.

Before we delved into details about his personal life, Edmondos
explained how his family first came to Egypt and their long presence in
the clothing business. His family history in Egypt dates back to 1880,
when his grandfather arrived in Tanta, a city southeast of Alexandria, from
Kythira, Greece. In Tanta, he first worked as an estate agent for some
years. Edmondos's father was born in Tanta and worked in a clothing and
novelty store owned by Jewish people for several years. As he was skilled
at his work, the owners sent him to their new store in Alexandria. While
Edmondos's father was working for the store, he inherited some money
from his late aunt and decided to open his own business. In 1908, he
opened a stationery store, which he operated until 1950.

In 1935, Edmondos's father opened two additional stores, one of
which was Minerva. By the late 1930s, he owned three businesses.
Edmondos completed his studies at the Salvageios Commercial School
and continued the business with his brother. The family sold some
property throughout the years, but the main store, Minerva, remained. Per
my question as to why he decided to remain, Edmondos responded that his
brother had opted to migrate to Athens in 1957, where they both became
involved in business, too. Because Edmondos decided to remain in Egypt,

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[37] Interview with the author, January 2016.

the brother sold him his share of the property in Egypt. Edmondos thus took Minerva under his exclusive ownership after 1970. He commented:

> I felt an obligation to stay, as I was now the sole owner of Minerva. I wanted to make some property here so that I could launch something later on in Greece. I had in my mind that life would be better in Greece, especially for my children. So, I built a block of flats in Paleo Faliro (Athens), opened a shop there, and left my son there to manage the property. He lives in Athens now, and he is married to a Greek.

Minerva, in Edmondos's story, not only symbolized perseverance but also reflected negotiation and adjustment. For many Greeks, maintaining property was not the only motive for their stay. Beyond the sense of the actual commodity and belonging, property seemed to define social and economic relations [38] and communicated a certain sense of agency, struggle, and rootedness. In what ways did property and ownership contribute to feelings of permanence? Moreover, what elements of adjustment and resistance did this entail?

According to Davina Cooper, property should be perceived as more than belonging focused on mastery and defined by the subject–object relationship; rather, it should be analysed in relation to power, recognition, definition and codification. [39] Nicholas Blomley concurs that property should be analysed concerning power and resistance and be examined according to the politics of place. [40] In addition, the ways property involves both representation and practice should be viewed. [41]

For Edmondos, Minerva anchored his stay in Alexandria in a period when economic and political changes were taking place in society. As mentioned earlier in this article, Nasser introduced a series of nationalization laws in 1961. Edmondos's property was not nationalized due to its medium scale, and thus, he could continue operating it. Through Minerva, he experienced a more permanent and rooted presence, in a period in which he himself did not even have citizenship rights. Hence, Minerva granted Edmondos agency, as, through it, he had a claim on the land.

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[38] Davina Cooper, "Opening Up Ownership: Community Belonging, Belongings and the Productive Life of Property," *Law and Social Inquiry*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2007): 5–6.

[39] Cooper, "Opening Up Ownership," 4–8.

[40] Nicholas Blomley, "Landscapes of Property," *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (1998): 567–612.

[41] Blomley, "Landscapes of Property," 567–612.

In Edmondos's statement, the word 'obligation' was apparent, similarly uttered in the reflections of other interviewees. It appeared to entail the efforts and struggle he engaged in acquiring a property, revealing his strong links and rootedness to the land and legitimising his presence in Egypt. Edmondos felt that he could not abandon Minerva since he had complete ownership of it. As this property was a family business, this feeling of obligation extended to his father and what his family had achieved before him. This could be interpreted as his feeling of indebtedness towards his migrant past, in homage to his grandfather, who arrived in Tanta as an economic migrant in the late nineteenth century. At the same time, the links with Greece he expressed also depicted his feeling of belonging to both Greece and Egypt and a longing for a life in Greece.

To my question on why he believed other Greeks remained, Edmondos responded that certain families had strong property interests in Alexandria—it was in their interest to remain. These interests ranged from land ownership and blocks of flats to shops and industries. Among those who decided to remain for such reasons, many interviewees mentioned that it was difficult to liquidate their property and leave. In many cases, these people were in charge of property management since other family members had left Egypt or had passed away. Another example of this is the story of Mairi and Michalis.[42]

The siblings Mairi and Michalis, born in 1951 and 1947, respectively, were also linked through property in Alexandria. Their maternal grandfather had migrated from Kastellorizo, Greece, to work on the opening of the Suez Canal. When the work was completed, their mother, who was born in Suez, resettled in Alexandria. Their father, originally from Constantinople, migrated with his family to Alexandria; after a short stop in Greece, he started working as a road contractor. Afterwards, he opened the 'Odeon' cinema in Alexandria. From then on, he began to purchase property, including blocks of flats. Michalis was considered the only one suitable to manage the family's property. Thus, even though he was away for some period in Brussels due to family affairs, he was forced to return to Alexandria. Michalis observed:

> As a family, we had some property. My youngest uncle, who was the most active among the three brothers, passed away. As a result, someone had to take responsibility for managing the property. My sister was much younger, so I had to take responsibility. I was more involved in the

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[42] Interview with the author, January 2016.

family's affairs, and I also had better [Arabic] language skills. I was
more experienced, as I was also working during summertime.

As Mairi mentioned, the other uncle and cousins decided to leave
Egypt, so it was expected that her brother Michalis would be the one to
take care of the property. She also commented that the family did not own
any agricultural land, so the state could not confiscate their property.[43]

As in Edmondos's story, here, too, the sense of obligation
becomes paramount to see the links through property these people had
with family and land. Neal Miller stated that three ownership rites
dominate land and home ownership: the rites of identity, the rites of
settlement, and the rites of struggle.[44] The first two rites are related to
one's history and practices that make one trustworthy to own property. In
the rites of struggle, ownership is described and justified by all the
activities and rituals that have demonstrated that the person has made
enough effort to deserve ownership.[45] In Edmondos's story, as in the story
of Mairi and Michalis, their properties encompassed all these rites,
interconnecting power, rootedness and belonging to the land. Their
belonging related to their migrant family histories, strengthening their long
social ties with Egypt and proving them trustworthy to own such assets. In
some respects, this belonging entitled them to agency over the land and
made their presence permanent.

Next to the stories of property and land ownership, the
conversations I had with some Greeks were informative of how some had
experienced and performed their citizenship and thus belonging while
facing certain challenges and opportunities. Regarding my question of
whether they felt more rooted or safer after obtaining Egyptian citizenship,
many of them commented, 'No. But practical things concerning your day-

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[43] The Egyptian Agrarian Reform Law 178/1952 concerned reforms in land
ownership. Law 178/1952, and later Law 108/1953, restricted landholding by
declaring that no single entity could possess more than 200 feddans (one feddan is
1.038 acres or 0.42 hectares). Furthermore, Law 15/1963 forbade foreigners from
owning any agricultural land, although it did allow residential real estate, with
some limitations. Other laws that governed ownership by foreigners were Law
143/1981 and Law 230/1996. USAID, *Country Profile, Egypt: Property Rights
and Resource Governance* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2010), 7.
[44] Neal Milner, "Ownership Rights and the Rites of Ownership," *Law & Social
Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1993): 227–253.
[45] Milner, "Ownership Rights," 227–253.

to-day services, were solved'.[46] These practical things ranged from the cost of hospital expenses and studies, which was much higher for non-Egyptians, to renewing their permits.

From my interviews, it was clear that Greeks were most concerned with the discomfort of renewing their residence and work permits annually coupled with the fact that they had to deal with the authorities in order to secure work and life status. Yet, once they obtained Egyptian citizenship, many of these fears were lessened due to the emergence of new possibilities for mobility and commerce. For instance, Kostas, an interviewee from Cairo, highlighted the flexibility he felt concerning his profession once he became an Egyptian national.[47] He stated:

> When I got citizenship, I felt freer. I felt I had more possibilities concerning my profession. If I wanted to change jobs, I could do it without much stress. The practical issues were solved. It was a satisfaction that I had no problems with the bureaucracy; I do not have to deal with them anymore.

With citizenship came flexibility of work and the end of the authorities' control and the bureaucracy it entailed, thus fortifying their position in society. Kostas's statement that he no longer wanted to deal with the bureaucracy highlighted a change in his relationality to the authorities: he was no longer a non-Egyptian and, in some respects, no longer in opposition to the authorities. Moreover, this feeling some Greeks had of being burdened by the bureaucracy was echoed by several interviewees, reflecting a certain insecurity they felt, given their fears that the authorities might not renew their permits.

The experiences of Greeks and how they performed belonging were as much shaped by opportunities and obstacles they encountered in both Egypt and Greece. As 'active agents in the negotiations of belonging',[48] their stories raised questions regarding conceptions of identity and exposed how contested these conceptions were in given situations and locales. The following section extends this discussion,

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[46] Interviews with the author of Greeks in Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt, June 2015 and January 2016.

[47] Interview with the author, January 2016.

[48] Anastasia Christou, "Narrating Lives in (E)motion: Embodiment, Belongingness and Displacement in Diasporic Spaces of Home and Return," *Emotion, Space and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (November 2011): 254.

touching upon the feeling of dual longing and belonging between Greece and Egypt.

Dual Longing and Belonging

> It was a fact that there was one foot here and one there, but when might leave never came up (Yorgos, born in 1950, Cairo).[49]

Standing between two places, Greeks seemed to live between two different countries. Yorgos, mentioned above, stressed that those Greeks who were able to would typically build homes in Greece to secure a place to stay when the 'repatriation' eventually happened. However, the time of this repatriation was neither clear nor set. He emphasized that if one were satisfied, they considered home to be wherever they stood, stressing his view that Egypt provided him with opportunities to have a satisfactory life and a place where he felt he belonged.

Many Greeks I met in Egypt dreamt of moving permanently to Greece, and it was noteworthy that they had not yet accomplished this goal. The building of a house seemed to serve more an emotional need, as it engendered certain possibilities of being present in two places. In actuality, for many of them, this feeling of longing, while intense, did not compel them to leave the actual life they were living in Egypt.

In many ways, this longing for Greece had been fulfilled by the idea of having a home there; moreover, through annual 'return' visits—often during the summer holiday—they could engage in a form of 'elective belonging'. [50] Michael Savage, Gaynor Bagnall, and Brian Longhurst reflect on the notion of 'elective belonging', suggesting that people with high mobility and access to several social networks and spaces develop a broader sense of belonging. Thus, they negotiate their localities differently as they expand their range of possibilities.[51]

Nina Glick Schiller and other scholars define the interconnections of immigrants from across borders as transnational processes and their networks in the countries of origin as transnational networks.[52] Here I do

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[49] Interview with the author, January 2016.
[50] Michael Savage, Gaynor Bagnall, and Brian J. Longhurst, *Globalization and Belonging* (London: Sage, 2005).
[51] Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, *Globalization*.
[52] See for example: Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton-Blanc, "Transnationalism: A new analytic framework for understanding migration." In *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and*

not employ the framework of transnational networks to Greeks in Egypt, defining them instead as a *diaspora with transnational agency.*[53] First, since their settlement in Egypt, Greeks have organized as a diaspora through their *koinotites*,[54] associations and other institutions, which have formed their educational, cultural and religious base. The Greeks I interviewed were not migrants themselves. Some of them engaged and depended, often daily, on transnational connections and experiences taking place through international travel and commerce across the Mediterranean Sea, bridging Greece to Egypt.

Second, in the cases I studied, Greeks' transnational experiences were taking place on an individual level and were not organized in the framework of networks. In addition, not all Greeks in Egypt had or wanted these transnational experiences; for some, this was economically out of their reach. Many low-income Greeks mentioned in our conversations the limited opportunities they felt they had in life, with their financial situation not allowing them mobility outside Egypt or even within.

Those Greeks who participated in transnational experiences were moving between Greece and Egypt, thus engaging in institutions and transactions in both countries; they were incorporated into both economies in one or another way, illustrating their mobility and agency in transnational spaces.[55] Comments like 'You are longing to return to Egypt when you are in Greece, and you are longing to leave to Greece when you are here' highlighted the dual longing overtaking some Greeks who embarked on these short visits. Apparently, their diasporic realities lived and performed between Egypt and Greece were not separate but intertwined. Thus, their

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Nationalism Reconsidered, eds. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton-Blanc (New York: New York Academy, 1992), 1– 24; Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects and the Deterritorialized Nation-state* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1994); Russell King and Anastasia Christou, "Of Counter-Diaspora and Reverse Transnationalism: Return Mobilities to and from the Ancestral Homeland." In *Links to the Diasporic Homeland: Second Generation and Ancestral* "*Return*" *Mobilities*, eds. Russell King, Anastasia Christou, and Peggy Levitt (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 451–466.

[53] Gabriel Sheffer asserts that a distinction needs to be made between transnational communities and diasporas, as their features and qualities are different. See Gabriel Sheffer, "Transnational and Ethnonational Diasporism," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies,* Vol. 15, No. 1 (2006): 121–145.

[54] *Koinotites* is the plural of the *koinotita*, mentioned earlier in this article.

[55] For example, many Greeks in Egypt receive pensions from both countries or engage in business or property ownership in both places.

longing intersected with their lived experience, creating a desire for a return to the destination they had just left.

Return is an essential part of diasporic bodies, as it enables them to feel 'stability, continuity, and permanence'.[56] By returning to Greece for education and the milieu, Greeks, even though born and raised in Egypt, were revisiting certain notions of their identity that were transmitted to them through family generations. Indeed, through their accounts, the strongest links with the 'homeland' seemed not to be physical but more recollections of conversations and memories they had.[57] In addition, their accounts highlighted how transnational processes could inscribe aspects of identity when visiting the 'homeland'.[58] At the same time, they were also longing for certain parts of their identity as Greeks while being physically away from Egypt, confirming the 'multi-locationality within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries' diasporic bodies experience in their identity.[59]

Sotiria, a Greek from Cairo, commented on the feeling of being in between these two countries.[60] She mentioned her intense feeling of being Egyptian, besides being Greek, because all her memories—from childhood to when she gave birth to her own kids—took place in Egypt. She noted, 'All my memories are here; how can this be undone? (*pos na to kanoume*?).' The relationships Sotiria formed in Cairo tied her to this 'home' country of Egypt.[61] Thus, these relationships formed her experiences and the possibilities she saw both in Egypt and Greece. For her, being Egyptian and having memories in Egypt was a fact, something that was undeniable. Her memories reinforced her feeling of belonging and her

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[56] In her work on Pieds-Noirs in Algeria, Amy Hubbell stated that the settlers were interested in returning to a particular past, related to their identity in Algeria. Amy L. Hubbell, *Remembering French Algeria: Pieds-Noirs, Identity, and Exile* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 139.

[57] Joanna Boampong, "Of Journeys, Returns, and Transnational Subject Formations: Reflections on the Homeland/Hostland Dialectic in Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's Novels," *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2017): 87–97.

[58] Akhil Gupta, "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in late Capitalism," *Cultural Anthropology,* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1992): 63–77.

[59] Brah, *Cartographies*, 194.

[60] Interview with the author, January 2016.

[61] Similarly, Sirceci analyses the relations Turkish Kurds formed in Germany and how these relations tied some of them to their new home country. See Ibrahim Sirceci, *The Environment of Insecurity in Turkey and the Emigration of Turkish Kurds to Germany* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006): 265–272.

identity as an Egyptian.

At the same time, Sotiria, like other interviewees, emphasized the 'Greek' social world they experience in Egypt through gatherings and social events in Cairo- and Alexandria-based clubs for the Greek communities.[62] Indeed, the discussions I had with Greeks more often than not took place in those clubs, indicating how preserving a Greek environment within Egyptian society was critical to anchor their stay there.[63]

Nevertheless, the longing for Greece was never embodied in actual migration and settlement, demonstrating certain tensions some experienced vis-à-vis their 'homecomings' to Greece. Tasos, Sotiria's husband, mentioned his annual summer trips with his wife to Leros, Greece. He recounted the feeling of 'foreignness', which he experienced as a diaspora Greek, something he had also felt back in Egypt as an ethnic Greek. He explained: 'See what has happened to us? We are foreigners here (in Egypt), and when we go to Greece, we are foreigners there too'. His wife shared the sentiment. When narrating stories about their visits to Greece, Sotiria mentioned that Greeks living in Greece referred to her and her husband as Egyptians and not 'Egyptiots' (i.e., Greek Egyptians), despite correcting them several times.

Indeed, circulating within these feelings of dual longing and belonging were strong feelings of estrangement and foreignness. Navigating these somewhat contradictory feelings, Greeks actively negotiated their presence and identity. There were specific spatial references of foreignness (foreigners here, foreigners there) in the accounts above, as Greeks moved from one place to another. The perception of estrangement and foreignness seemed to be imposed on them, as reflected in how others (i.e., Greeks in

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[62] See for example, the Greek club in El-Shatby and the Greek Yacht Club, both in Alexandria, and the Greek Club of Cairo, in downtown Cairo.

[63] As Irakleitos Souyioultzoglou notes, the preservation of 'Greekness'—which in this case was expressed through their social world—acted as a response or to (or refuge from) the increasing 'Egyptianness' that was taking place in society. Thus, it was their way to adjust to the changing environment by holding onto some aspects of it, especially when the presence of Greeks was declining. See Irakleitos Souyioultzoglou, "Apo tin Istoria sti Mnimi: Ideologikes kai Fantasiakes Synathroiseis tis Ellinikis Paroikias stin Aigypto" [From History to Memory: Ideological and Imaginary Articulations of the Greek Community in Egypt], In *Tautotites kai Eterotites se Periodous Krisis: Mnimi kai Vioafigisi* eds. Antonis Antoniou, Riki van Bouschoten, Antonis Dalkavoukis and Yorgos Tsiolis (Athens: Enosi Proforikis Istorias, forthcoming).

Greece) saw them not as Greeks but as Egyptians. In addition, their migrant stories demarcated processes of identification and belonging while exploring different geographies of home as a performative act.[64]

Conclusion

The several oral accounts of the Greeks who remained in Egypt, coupled with the archival documents discussed throughout this chapter, highlight the alternatives and new environments for Greeks of Egypt explored at an institutional and individual level. During a period when the only solutions seemed to be 'repatriation' to Greece, migration to a third country, or 'readjustment' in the strict confines of the post-colonial Egyptian state, their now documented accounts challenge the idea that they were or have been absent. Indeed, previous studies of Greek residents of Egypt have not explored their presence after the 1960s.

The Greeks who remained in Egypt have negotiated and adjusted to new socioeconomic realities, creating alternatives and new environments for their lives. Their stay and presence expose the struggle, perseverance, and adjustments they have encountered to make their stay permanent. Thus, the opportunities or obstacles they have faced have shaped their presence and belonging to Egypt, performed as 'active agents in the negotiations of belonging'.[65] Their stories raise questions about how they construct and preserve their identity in both places, exposing the tensions—explicit and implicit—they experience when attempting to navigate two unique yet interconnected homes and citizenships.

For those who were able to tap into this transnational mobility, certain imaginations and expectations about community, space, and establishing roots are revealed—for the latter, how to become firmly rooted in a place that does not yet accept your residence permanently. Hence, inevitable political tensions emerge out of this mobility—or lack thereof—and more so, the hard reality that access to opportunity is not equal for all residents of Egypt.

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[64] Christou, "Narrating lives," 249–257.
[65] Christou, "Narrating Lives," 254.

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