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The Netherlands

Beyond departure: the Greek in Egypt, 1962-1976

Mylona, E.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Suez Canal Region as a Socioeconomic Environment of *Egyptiots* After 1962

Introduction

This chapter examines the social processes, economic developments and political factors that defined *Egyptiots*' lived experiences of employment, class, citizenship, and social and geographic mobility, and how these interplayed in shaping their decisions to remain or leave Egypt. I analyze these factors by looking at the *Egyptiot* communities who lived in the cities of the Canal Zone, mainly until 1967 and 1973. Among social processes, I discuss how migration, post-colonialism, the change of the *Egyptiot* community's composition in the 1960s and 1970s, and their ideas about Egyptian citizenship and 'Greekness' shaped their access to resources and their geographic and social mobility. Next to this, I analyze how political factors, such as the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973 and consequently the political relations they formed between *Egyptiots* and the Egyptian state, and economic developments, like the labor laws in Egypt and economic conditions in the Mediterranean, affected *Egyptiots*' experiences of labor, class and citizenship. By looking at how these social, economic and political factors defined *Egyptiots*' social and economic environments, this chapter demonstrates the non-homogeneous nature of the *Egyptiot* communities, namely these of Alexandria, Cairo and the Suez Canal region.

3.1 The Suez Canal Region: An Overview

Inaugurated in 1869, the Suez Canal transformed the Mediterranean Sea by connecting it by a faster and safer route to Asia.⁴⁰³ The Suez Canal represented progress; it became a territory of

⁴⁰³ The inauguration took place in 1869, but constructions began in 1859.

production, capital flow and of movement of people and goods.⁴⁰⁴ As a response to this global economic change—referring here to the opening of the Suez Canal—a trans-Mediterranean mobility occurred, with many Greek *Egyptiots*, primarily from the Dodecanese, and other foreigners, migrating to Egypt for work.

The opening of the Suez Canal exposed the ‘imperial politics of mobility’, as it was a project of colonial expansion.⁴⁰⁵ As Valeska Huber has shown in her work, multiple mobilities were manifested in the canal, which combined with several hierarchies and sovereignties; imperial, local, commercial, and international.⁴⁰⁶ Not only was there the British presence, as the colonial power at that time in Egypt, but also the French-administered *Compagnie universelle du Canal maritime de Suez* (henceforth the Suez Canal Company)⁴⁰⁷ had an important role in shaping these mobilities. Together with the Egyptian government and its police force, the several consulates of the international community, the private companies of mining and shipping, among others, characterized the multiple sovereignties and hierarchies at play.⁴⁰⁸

The cities of the Canal were created after its opening. Port Said was the first in 1859, then Ismailia (Timsah) in 1862, and Port Tawfik in 1867. The Suez Canal and its cities, especially Port Said, have been portrayed in literature and cinematography as an industrial hub and a very well-connected and ‘cosmopolitan’ place,⁴⁰⁹ with many merchants, industrialists and sailors residing or passing through.⁴¹⁰ Even though Port Said shared certain

⁴⁰⁴ Valeska Huber, *Channeling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ The Suez Canal Company was created in 1858. It was an Egyptian joint-stock company, with the British government the main stakeholder from 1875. Valeska Huber, “Connecting colonial seas: the ‘international colonization’ of Port Said and the Suez Canal during and after the First World War,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D’histoire*, 19/1 (2012), 141-161, 145.

⁴⁰⁸ Valeska Huber, “Multiple Mobilities, Multiple Sovereignties, Multiple Speeds: Exploring Maritime Connections in the Age of Empire,” *International Journal Middle East Studies*, 48 (2016), 763-766, 764.

⁴⁰⁹ On ‘cosmopolitanism’ being a problematic term, see footnote 288, on chapter two.

⁴¹⁰ Salma Mobarak, “L’imaginaire cinématographique de Port-Saïd,” *Sociétés & Représentations*, 48/2 (2019), 95-108.

commonalities with Alexandria, both being port cities in the Eastern Mediterranean with many foreigners and a distinct ‘cosmopolitan’ character, it still appeared smaller and more provincial.⁴¹¹ The scenes from the port, the bourgeois beaches and the songs of the *simsimīya*⁴¹² predominated in depictions of Port Said until 1956, before the invasion of that year. This continued in the late 1970s, and, according to Salma Mobarak, only changed after 1981, when Port Said started to appear as the city of the rich, due to the peace agreement signed by Anwar Sadat and the new economic policies that were introduced.⁴¹³

Colonial and nationalist projects and technological achievements, together with urban development and architecture, presented as European achievements, became predominant narratives in the historiography of the Canal.⁴¹⁴ They sketched in utopic and romantic colors the Canal and its cities, and veiled any political, social and economic tensions and asymmetries.⁴¹⁵ Lucia Carminati supported the idea that the histories of the Canal acted as ‘outlets for different political projects’ painted in nationalist or colonial colors.⁴¹⁶ Such accounts sketched on a superficial level the cities of the Canal, as if they were empty of the lived experiences of the people there. Accounts of the working-class communities,⁴¹⁷ who were predominant in the cities of the Canal, were especially not included in those narratives.

⁴¹¹ Mobarak, “L’imaginaire cinématographique,” 100.

⁴¹² The *simsimīya* is a stringed instrument that has its roots in ancient Egypt.

⁴¹³ Mobarak, “L’imaginaire cinématographique,” 98.

⁴¹⁴ Lucia Carminati, “Suez: A hollow canal in need of peopling. Currents and stoppages in the historiography, 1859-1956,” *History Compass*, 19/e12650 (2021), 1-14.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ Carminati critically examines scholarly works that idealized the lived experiences of workers at the Suez Canal company, but also those works in Egyptian historiography that unveiled the trauma of such experiences. See, for example: Hubert Bonin’s *History of the Suez Canal Company, 1858-2008 Between Controversy and Utility*, and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Muḥammad Shinnāwī’s *Al-Sukhrah fī ḥafr Qanāt al-Suways*. *Ibid.*, 3. Similarly, for an analysis on the workers of the Aswan High Dam and their experiences in building this national project, see: Alia Mossallam, ““We are the ones who made this dam ‘High’!” A builders’ history of the Aswan High Dam,” *Water Hist*, 6 (2014), 297–314.

⁴¹⁷ Henk Driessen has highlighted that only specific categories of people were included in ‘cosmopolitanism,’ like merchants and seamen, leaving other categories out. Henk Driessen, “Mediterranean,” 138. For further references, see the discussion of this topic on chapter two.

3.2 *Egyptiots*' Lived Experiences of Citizenship

Egyptian citizenship was more prominent among *Egyptiots* in the cities of the Canal Zone. About one third of the population there had citizenship; a much larger number compared to the communities of Cairo and Alexandria.⁴¹⁸ This section examines how social processes and economic activities, alongside political factors, impacted *Egyptiots*' experiences of citizenship, their access to resources and degree of mobility. According to the archival material and oral accounts I discuss here, two main factors motivated *Egyptiots* to obtain Egyptian citizenship; their employment in certain companies that demanded Egyptian citizenship after 1956, and the stateless status of some *Egyptiot* residents. I will discuss the latter phenomenon first.

The Case of the *Apatrides*

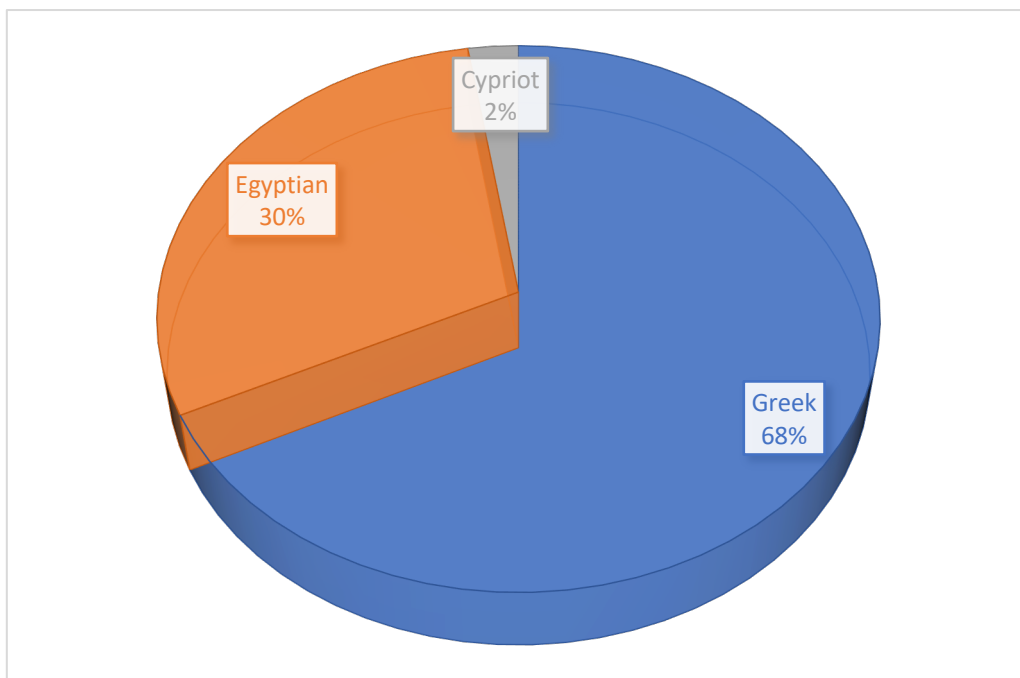
In the 1960s, *Egyptiots* who held Greek citizenship were still the largest category in the Suez Canal Zone, but on a smaller scale compared to the findings I discussed in the previous chapter, concerning the population of Alexandria and Cairo. Specifically, as the graph below indicates, 68% of *Egyptiots* held Greek citizenship, 30% Egyptian, and only 2% Cypriot:⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ These are the findings of all the birth and health certificates/health ID cards, *shahāda al-milāād*, of *Egyptiot* children who were born and registered in Suez and Ismailia, and the students' cards, *biṭāqa madrasīya/ atomiko deltio mathētou* of the Suez and Port Tawfik community school I examined between 1961 and 1967. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

TABLE 3:1

Egyptiots' Citizenship Status in the 1960s



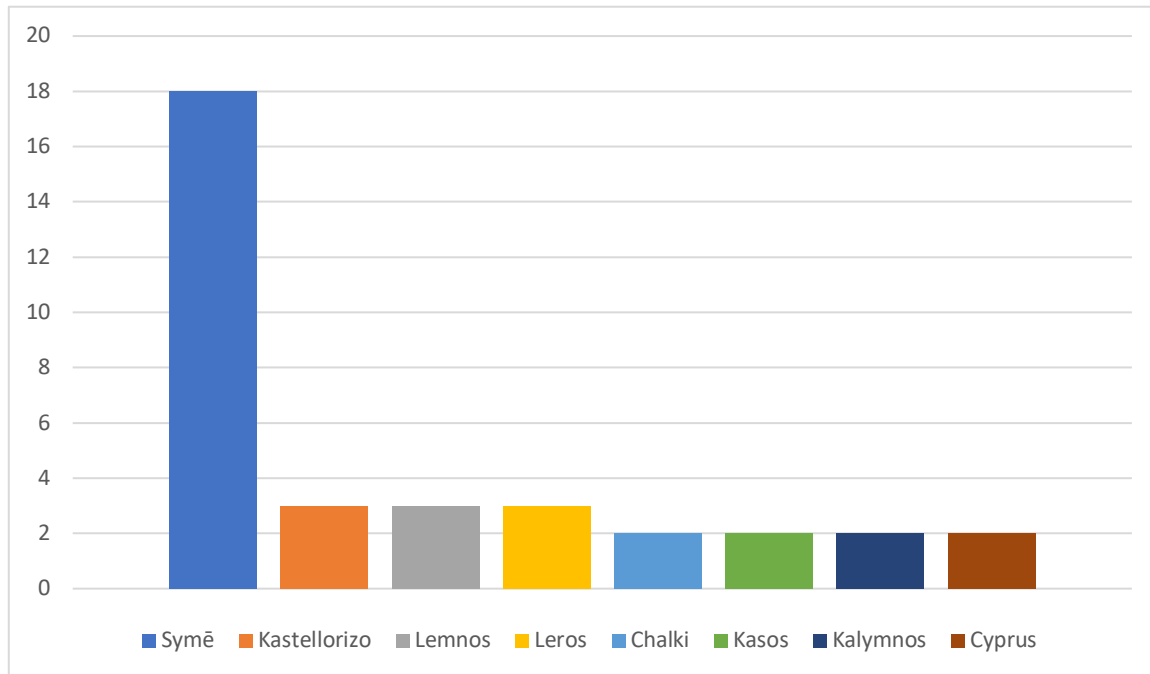
The *Egyptiot* population in the Suez Canal region originated predominantly from the Dodecanese islands of Symi, Kastellorizo and Kasos,⁴²⁰ and as the chart below indicates, most *Egyptiots* who held Egyptian citizenship were from Symi, followed by those coming from the islands of Kastellorizo, Lemnos, and Leros:⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ 94 out of 211 registered *Egyptiots* migrated from the Dodecanese islands. The *Egyptiots* from Symi were the largest group among all *Egyptiots* residing in the Suez Canal region. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou. For example, many Kasiois came to work on the Canal, after the burning and massacre of Kasos in 1824, during the Greek War of Independence.

⁴²¹ This was the result of the examination I made of all the birth and health certificates/health ID cards, *shahāda al-milāād*, of *Egyptiot* children who were born and registered in Suez and Ismailia, and the students' cards, *biṭāqa madrasīya/atomiko deltio mathētou* of the Suez and Port Tawfik community school. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

TABLE 3:2

Egyptian Citizenship and *Egyptiots*' Origins



Most of the *Egyptiots* living in the Canal Zone originated from places that became part of the Greek state long after its foundation (1830).⁴²² As such, those *Egyptiots* who arrived in Egypt from some parts of the Ottoman Empire, such as Asia Minor, Cyprus, and the Dodecanese, prior to 1914, when Egypt was still a *de jure* Ottoman province, were considered Ottoman subjects. In the 1907 and 1917 Egyptian censuses, Ottoman subjects were further categorized as foreigners, a category that contained Greeks, Syrians, Armenians and others. Therefore, according to the 1917 census, Greeks as Ottoman subjects throughout Egypt were estimated to be 4,258 persons.⁴²³

⁴²² For example, the Dodecanese Islands from which most *Egyptiots* arrived in the Canal region were under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire until the Italo-Turkish war in 1911. In 1912, Italy occupied the islands until the end of WWII. When the Italians left, the Dodecanese passed under German and British occupation, until they became part of the Greek nation state in 1947.

⁴²³ Will Hanley notes that 'subjecthood was the concept of membership' in the 19th century, with the Ottoman sultan seen as the shepherd of a flock (*reaya* in Arabic), and with notions of loyalty and protection and not of sovereignty to define the relationship with his subjects. Will Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans and Egyptians in Alexandria*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 239; 240-241.

The Ottoman subjects of Greek origin did not pass any borders, as they came from other parts of the Ottoman Empire and in some cases, it took decades for them to obtain papers from the Egyptian state. Consequently, they were listed in some documents as *Apatrides*, meaning stateless people.⁴²⁴ For instance, one of my interviewees recalled that his grandfather arrived from Cyprus to Egypt in 1905, and only obtained Egyptian citizenship in 1950. Until then, he could not leave Egypt, as he did not have any papers.⁴²⁵

The *Apatrides* were still present in post-colonial Egypt, but their number had shrunk. Specifically, in 1953, in Suez, the Greek consulate authorities estimated that there were 2,325 Greek nationals. Alongside this, there were still 80 *Apatrides* of Greek origin, 270 British and 100 Egyptian nationals, making the total number of people of Greek origins 2,775 persons.⁴²⁶ *Apatrides*' presence could be traced on the birth certificates, *shahāda al-milād*, of the *Egyptiot* children who were born and registered in Suez and Ismailia in the 1950s and the 1960s without citizenship status. Indeed, in some of those birth certificates, no citizenship status was written; rather it was only stated the *ra'īya maḥallīya*⁴²⁷ which can be translated to English as local subject (flock) or local residency.⁴²⁸ While limited in number, these cases shed light on the complex manner in which individuals were controlled in the Ottoman Egypt, and their access to citizenship later in post-colonial Egypt.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁴ I refer here to the *Egyptiots* with a stateless status. The term *Apatrides* appeared both in my discussions with some *Egyptiots* (e.g., Interview over email with A.K, March 29, 2015), and in scholarly works. See, for example: Angelos Ntalachanis, "Les archives grecques de Suez: un fonds inédit," *Annales Islamologiques*, 45 (2011), 307-320, 310.

⁴²⁵ Interview over email with A.K, March 29, 2015.

⁴²⁶ Ntalachanis, "Les archives grecques de Suez," 310.

⁴²⁷ Hanley referred to this term as *reaya*, meaning the Ottoman flock. Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality*, 239.

⁴²⁸ Birth and health certificates/health ID cards, *Shahāda al-milād*, of *Egyptiot* children who were born and registered in Suez and Ismailia. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴²⁹ Even though Egypt was occupied by the British in 1882, Ottoman identifications were still at play. Indeed, the nationalist discourse of the 1890s used Ottomanism as a political strategy to oppose British control. Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality*, 239.

Chryssoula Sava, for example, was an *Egyptiot* child who appeared with no citizenship status at first, and then acquired Egyptian citizenship.⁴³⁰ Chryssoula was born in 1947 in Port Tawfik, where she resided with her family. Her father was originally from Kastellorizo (written as Megistē, the ancient name of the island), and he worked as a mechanic in an undefined company. On her birth certificate there was no citizenship status, but only the *ra 'īya maḥallīya*, indicating that she was a local resident of Port Tawfik. However, her status changed some years afterwards. Specifically, when she attended the 5th grade of the Suez and Port Tawfik community school in the 1963/1964 academic year, the *ra 'īya maḥallīya* changed to Egyptian citizenship on her student card.⁴³¹ This meant that her father had gained access to Egyptian citizenship sometime in the 1950s or early 1960s, but lacked citizenship until then.

The link between the stateless status of the *Apatrides* and the *ra 'īya maḥallīya* was not self-evident or straight forward in the archival records. However, the fact that this term was already in use by the Ottoman state to identify their subjects (*reaya* or *ra 'īya*, meaning the Ottoman flock)⁴³² indicates that those *Egyptiots*, like Chryssoula and her father, who were perceived by the Egyptian state as local subjects were the Ottoman subjects or the *Apatrides* who had no citizenship until they received Egyptian citizenship in the 1950s. In addition, the change of status (having no citizenship) on their birth certificates to having Egyptian citizenship on their student cards (*biṭāqa madrasīya/atomiko deltio mathētou*) indicated that the Egyptian state granted access to citizenship to those *Egyptiots* and others who were stateless. Hence, although limited in number, this category of *Egyptiots* added to the higher numbers of Egyptian citizenship among the Suez Canal region *Egyptiots*, because anyone

⁴³⁰ *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³² Both *reaya* and *ra 'īya* mean flock, but they have been transliterated under a different system.

who was stateless would have tried to obtain Egyptian citizenship as they were unable to obtain any other.

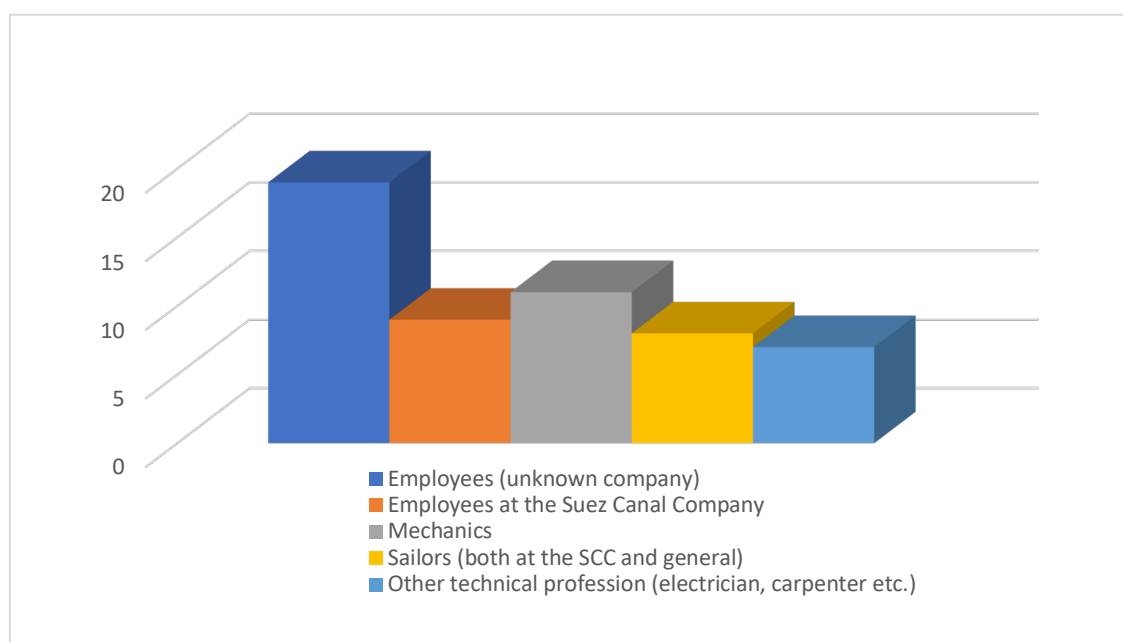
Citizenship as a Condition for Employment

Economic and social factors interplayed in demarcating *Egyptiots*' access to employment and citizenship. For example, some companies could only hire *Egyptiots* and other foreigners on the condition that they had Egyptian citizenship after 1956, once the laws concerning citizenship and work/residence permits changed. Thus, these demands in *Egyptiots*' work environment became a reason for them to obtain Egyptian citizenship, something that explains the relatively large number of citizenship holders amongst the *Egyptiot* residents of the Suez Canal region.

Indeed, according to the archival records, most *Egyptiots* who held Egyptian citizenship were employees, either at undefined companies or at the Suez Canal Company. Mechanics, sailors and other technical professions followed, as the table below depicts:

TABLE 3:3

Egyptian Citizenship and *Egyptiots*' Occupation in the 1960s⁴³³



One of my interviewees, Nikolas, born in 1944 in Suez, commented that many companies specializing in engineering, road construction and mining, especially around the ‘Atāqa Mountain, demanded after 1956 that their employees acquire Egyptian citizenship.⁴³⁴ This obligation did not come from the Suez Canal Company itself, but from the contractor companies, foreign or Greek-owned, which employed the personnel. These companies hired local labor, amongst them *Egyptiot* inhabitants of the Canal zone.

According to Nikolas, one of the largest contractors, perhaps the largest, was owned by Terzis Kompolikos. The founder of the company passed away in the 1930s or 1940s, but his son and later his grandson continued the business. Nikolas’ father worked for years as a contract engineer in and outside Suez, and for a short period at Terzis’ company. Due to this

⁴³³ *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētās Kairou.

⁴³⁴ Telephone interview with Nikolas, former resident of Suez, April 2, 2021.

short-term contract, he was not obliged to obtain Egyptian citizenship, but his colleagues who worked at the company for longer periods were subject to this condition.

International companies, like Shell, had similar prerequisites. Specifically, Nikolas recalled that his brother-in-law worked as a Shell employee for many years, and he was obliged by the company to acquire Egyptian citizenship sometime in the early 1960s.⁴³⁵ In order not to lose his job, he applied and obtained one. Nikolas' brother-in-law was able to remain in his post when he acquired Egyptian citizenship, until 1973, when he left, as did other *Egyptiots* due to the Arab-Israeli war.

Besides the contractor and international companies mentioned above, employees who worked at the Suez Canal Company were also granted access to Egyptian citizenship in the 1960s. I will refer here to two *Egyptiots* who appeared in the archival records, first with Greek citizenship, but later changing to Egyptian. The first case belongs to Charitomeni Giatrou, born in 1953 in Port Tawfik. Her birth certificate, *shahāda al-milād*, stated that she was originally from Symi and she, and thus her father, held Greek citizenship. Her father was a sailor (*bahhār*), who worked for the Suez Canal Company. Charitomeni's own citizenship status changed once she attended the community school of Suez and Port Tawfik. On her student card-*biṭāqa madrasīya/atomiko deltio mathētou*, Greek citizenship was no longer marked, but she appeared to hold Egyptian citizenship.⁴³⁶ Her student card stated that she was in her 2nd grade, but not the year she started school. Since Charitomeni was born in 1953, I assume that sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s her father requested and was able to obtain Egyptian citizenship due to his work at the Suez Canal Company, which extended automatically to his daughter.

⁴³⁵ Nikolas could not recall the exact year his brother-in-law obtained Egyptian citizenship. Telephone interview with Nikolas, former resident of Suez, April 2, 2021.

⁴³⁶ *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

Similarly, Nikolas Patros was born in 1949, also in Port Tawfik. His father also originated from Symi and worked as a sailor for the Suez Canal Company. The citizenship on Nikolas's birth certificate was Greek, which changed to Egyptian on his student card, when he attended the 5th grade of the Suez and Port Tawfik community school in the 1960s.⁴³⁷ Together, these archival records, with the oral account above, indicate that one of the reasons why *Egyptiots* in the Suez Canal region held Egyptian citizenship more than those in Cairo or Alexandria, was due to their work contracts with large contractor companies, foreign or Greek-owned, that required citizenship. Egyptian citizenship came as a condition in *Egyptiots'* work environments, who, in order to not lose their jobs, requested and were able to get it.

Even though some *Egyptiots* asked for Egyptian citizenship and were able to obtain it, they still had concerns about what this could entail for someone who lived in Egypt in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴³⁸ According to my interviewees, the hesitancy about having Egyptian citizenship amongst the Suez Canal region *Egyptiots* was largely due to the political climate and the fears of war in Egypt in the 1960s and 1970s, and the concern about having to serve in the Egyptian army.⁴³⁹ Their concerns around the army related to its harshness and long terms of service, and the fact that they were Orthodox Christians and some believed that they would be mistreated in the army due their different faith. Those concerns were not a new phenomenon among the *Egyptiots*, and not limited to those residing in the Suez Canal region. Angelos Dalachanis mentions that even when Law 160/1950 related to the rights of foreigners to Egyptian citizenship was issued, only a few *Egyptiots* applied to obtain it.⁴⁴⁰ Some of the reasons were similar to those mentioned by Nikolas and other interviewees, such

⁴³⁷ *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴³⁸ Four telephone interviews with *Egyptiots* who were based in Athens and originally came from the Suez, Port-Said and Ismailia, April 2021.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ Dalachanis, *Akyvernētē Paroikia*, 153.

as doubt at whether they would be treated equally to Egyptian Muslims and the obligation to serve in the Egyptian army.

Egyptian citizenship allowed both access to state resources, such as subsidized health care, and the ability of *Egyptiots* to keep their work.⁴⁴¹ Thus, practical reasons and everyday factors, like work, rather than emotionally loaded ones, encouraged and, in some cases, obliged *Egyptiots* to acquire Egyptian citizenship. However, the army and the political situation in Egypt acted as reasons for some *Egyptiots* not to acquire Egyptian citizenship. Concerns over a loss of ‘Greekness,’ meaning attachment to the Greek identity and belonging, were not mentioned as emotional obstacles in obtaining another citizenship. Hence, citizenship did not define one’s relationship to the land, either Egyptian or Greek.

Political Differences amongst Suez Canal *Egyptiots*

The smaller number of Cypriot nationals among the archival records of the 1960s⁴⁴² reflects the political situation of Egypt after 1956 and the political environment in the Eastern Mediterranean with regards to the British presence.⁴⁴³ The Egyptian and British authorities had signed the Anglo-Egyptian treaty in 1954, in which they agreed to put an end to the British occupation of the Suez Canal Zone. In this agreement, the British had until June 1956 to evacuate the Zone. As has been noted in the introduction, in October 1956, the Suez Crisis started, with Israel crossing into the Sinai Peninsula, and British and French planes bombarding the Canal Zone. In the aftermath of this, the Egyptian authorities expelled all British and French nationals from the country. Because many Cypriots who lived in Egypt

⁴⁴¹ By obtaining Egyptian citizenship, *Egyptiots* did not lose their Greek citizenship.

⁴⁴² *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴⁴³ As mentioned in the introduction, anti-Britishness was part of a larger process of decolonization in the post-war period in Egypt, and in the broader Mediterranean area, as elsewhere.

held British citizenship at the time, many changed their citizenship out of fear of possible expulsion due to the political turbulence.⁴⁴⁴ Indeed, according to the archival records from the cities of the Canal, two out of five Cypriots who were British nationals changed their citizenship to Cypriot during this period, and others who had held Cypriot citizenship in the past were given Greek papers to avoid expulsion.⁴⁴⁵ Therefore, this political development led to an increase in Greek citizenship in Egypt at this point in time.

For example, the birth certificate, *shahāda al-milaād*, of Themelina Zachariadou, who was born in 1950 in Suez, stated that her family was originally from Cyprus, and she held Cypriot citizenship. When she attended the 2nd grade of gymnasium at the community school of Suez and Port Tawfik in the 1963-1964 academic year, her student card-*biṭāqa madrasīya/atomiko deltio mathētou* stated that she held Greek citizenship. I assume that her father requested and changed his citizenship from Cypriot to Greek due to the political situation in those years; as such, his citizenship passed to his daughter as well.⁴⁴⁶

The crisis of 1956 influenced the relationship between *Egyptiot* workers in the Canal Zone and the Egyptian government, as *Egyptiots* stayed in their posts and did not depart. Indeed, *Egyptiot* pilots⁴⁴⁷ and Suez Canal Company workers remained in Egypt during the period of the Suez Crisis and supported Egypt against the imperialistic powers, showing their solidarity with Egyptians. One of my interviewees commented that when Abdel Nasser nationalized the Canal and, consequently, all the French pilots left their posts, *Egyptiots* remained in their jobs. They led the ships between Port Said, Ismailia and Suez, and helped to

⁴⁴⁴ As noted earlier in this dissertation, Gamal Abdel Nasser exempted the Greek Cypriots and Greek Jews from all measures targeting British citizens in Egypt with decree 206 in 1956. Dalachanis, *Akyvernētē Paroikia*, 102-103.

⁴⁴⁵ *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ I refer here to the navigators of larger ships in the canal who were called pilots, rather than captains.

train Egyptians who had no prior experience. Since they did not abandon their posts, the Egyptian government appreciated their loyalty.⁴⁴⁸

In addition, the Egyptian state and Egyptian national newspapers praised the *Egyptiot* communities in the Canal Zone for their solidarity towards Egyptians during the 1967 war to an even greater extent, especially the community in Port Said, as no *Egyptiot* left the city.⁴⁴⁹ Specifically, the governor of Port Said, Farid Toulan, addressed *Egyptiots* as true friends of Egypt due to their position in the war. He granted them more mobility with unlimited permits and a special unemployment benefit, elements that no other foreign community had at that time.⁴⁵⁰ This example demonstrates how experiences across the *Egyptiot* communities differed and how (unexpected) opportunities were created for some community members.

However, the social fabric of the cities of the Canal Zone changed considerably after 1956, and even more after the wars of 1967 and 1973, as some of my interviewees commented.⁴⁵¹ The impact of the 1967 war was shown in the community's declining numbers. The 1967 war and the fact that the Greek consulate moved to Cairo due to the conflict made *Egyptiots* reflect whether their stay could be permanent, or whether the only solution was to depart.⁴⁵² By 1967, most *Egyptiots* had left due to war, and in 1973 everyone left the Canal

⁴⁴⁸ Telephone interview with Nikolas, former resident of Suez, April 2, 2021. This appreciation was depicted in the Egyptian newspapers of that period, for example in *al-Ahram* and the *Egyptian Gazette*. Anthony Gorman refers to this in his work on the post-war Greek left. See: Anthony Gorman, "Egypt's Forgotten Communists: The Postwar Greek Left," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 20/1, (2002): 1-27, 14.

⁴⁴⁹ Daratzikis, *Ellēnismos Diōrygos*, 19.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Four telephone interviews with *Egyptiots* who were based in Athens and originally came from Suez, Port-Said and Ismailia, April 2021.

⁴⁵² The consulate of Port Said remained closed after the war and until 1976. Thus, its activities were managed by the consulate in Cairo. Under the Cairo consulate were also placed the consulates of Mansoura and Suez. Daratzikis, *Ellēnismos Diōrygos*, 19-21.

Zone.⁴⁵³ Only a single woman, Foula Margaraki, remained and kept her father's hardware store, until she left later for the community's home for the elderly in Alexandria⁴⁵⁴

The economic and political developments in Egypt and the broader Mediterranean demarcated *Egyptiots'* experiences of citizenship and access to state resources, their employment and degree of mobility. Specifically, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century, the labor laws in the 1950s and 1960s, the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 and the Arab Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973 not only influenced the cohesion of the *Egyptiot* community in the Canal region, but also impacted its relations with the post-colonial Egyptian state. Some of these factors, like the 1967 war and the *Egyptiots'* position towards the Egyptian government, granted *Egyptiots* access to state resources, which they would not have otherwise had. At the same time, the wars, as political factors, constrained their access to citizenship and employment, and impacted the community's numbers. Hence, social processes, economic activities and political factors among the Cairo, Alexandria and Suez Canal Zone *Egyptiots* did characterize the different lived experiences of citizenship, employment and geographical and social mobility and, therefore, the non-homogenous nature of these communities. Consequently, these factors impacted *Egyptiots'* decisions to remain in or to leave Egypt.

3.3 *Egyptiots'* Labor and Class Experiences

The predominant narratives in the historiography of the Canal do not depict the lived experiences of the people there, especially of the working class.⁴⁵⁵ Nevertheless, *Egyptiots*

⁴⁵³ The 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars did not impact only the *Egyptiot* population of the Canal region. These two wars caused displacement and a migration crisis for Egyptians and everyone else living in the canal zone. On this matter, see: Mohamed Abdel Shakur, Sohair Mehanna, and Nicholas S. Hopkins, "War and forced migration in Egypt: The experience of evacuation from the Suez Canal Cities (1967-1976)," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 27/3 (2005): 21-39.

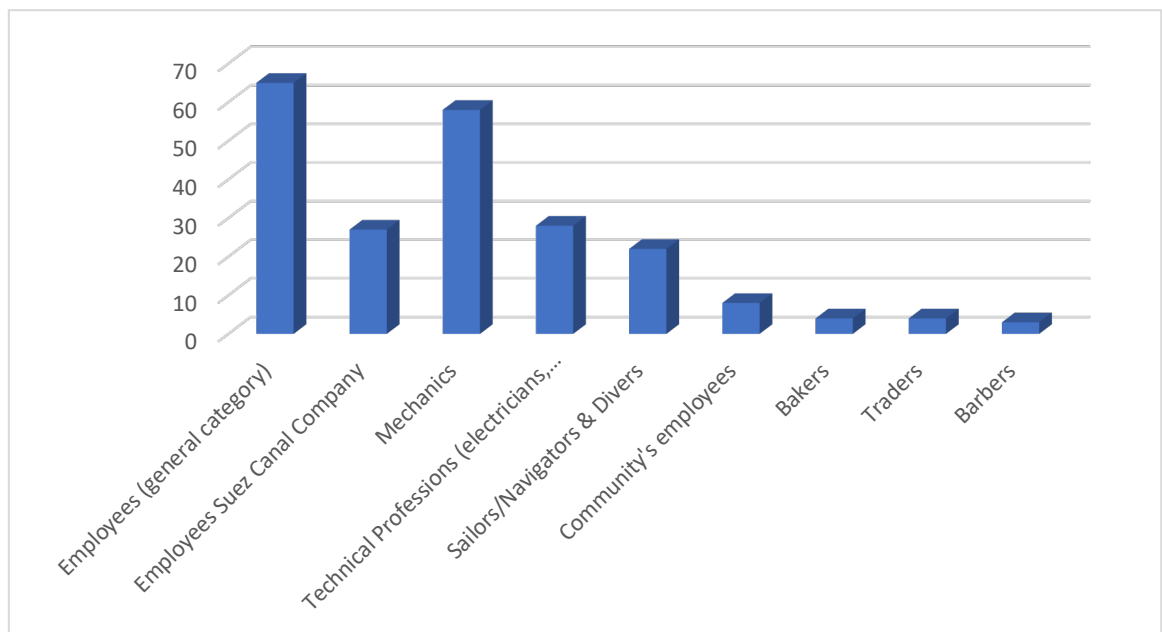
⁴⁵⁴ Telephone interview with Nikolas, former resident of Suez, April 2, 2021.

⁴⁵⁵ Carminati, "Suez: A hollow canal."

and other working-class foreigners, together with Egyptians, were behind the success of many companies around the Canal. The Suez Canal Company was one of the main employers for *Egyptians*. Indeed, as the graph below indicates, a little less than half of the category of ‘employees (general category)’ were workers at the Suez Canal Company, indicating the large-scale recruitment of *Egyptians* by the company:⁴⁵⁶

TABLE 3:4

Egyptians’ Professions in the 1960s



Until the 1920s, among the category of ‘Europeans’ at the Suez Canal Company, the Greek *Egyptians* were the largest group and were characterized as the most ‘suited’ for work at the canal.⁴⁵⁷ *Egyptians’* familiarity with the sea helped them in their new environment as

⁴⁵⁶ Under the category of ‘employees (general category)’ I have included those employees at the Suez Canal Company in order to give the total number of *Egyptians* who were employees in the cities of the Canal Zone. In addition, I created a separate category for the employees at the Suez Canal Company to show the vast employment of *Egyptians* by that company. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētās Kairou.

⁴⁵⁷ Barbara Curli, “Dames Employées at the Suez Canal Company: The “Egyptianization” of the female office workers, 1941-56,” *International Journal Middle East Studies*, 46 (2014), 554.

they and their children could find jobs more easily. For example, some of my interviewees mentioned that many *Egyptiots* were divers and workers on ships, and the highly skilled and educated among them became pilots and seamen.⁴⁵⁸ One stated that “Egyptians were afraid of the sea, and most of them did not know how to swim.”⁴⁵⁹ Hence, the islander *Egyptiots* were seen as the best fit for such jobs.⁴⁶⁰

Regarding employment in the Suez Canal Company, Barbara Curli has shown in her work the ‘racial’ and ‘gender’ criteria and organizational strategies the company employed in order to establish and maintain hierarchies and social control between the ‘Europeans’ and the indigenous population.⁴⁶¹ The main distinction among employees at the company was between the ‘employés,’ who were mainly white-collar workers, engineers, pilots, foremen and technical staff, and the manual workers. Until the 1930s, no Egyptian was under the category of the ‘employés,’ leaving the ‘Europeans,’ among them the *Egyptiots*, to occupy such positions.

Until this period, the Suez Canal Company was divided into four departments: Administration, Transit, Works, and Technical Services.⁴⁶² Most of the labor force was employed in Works. Besides the hierarchy between the ‘Europeans’ and the indigenous population, there was a clear hierarchy within the category of ‘Europeans.’ For example, according to Curli, *Egyptiots* and Italian Egyptians were mostly skilled workers and supervisors in the Works department, while French held higher positions, like those of

⁴⁵⁸ Four telephone interviews with *Egyptiots* who were based in Athens and originally came from the Suez, Port-Said and Ismailia, April 2021.

⁴⁵⁹ Telephone interview with Nikolas, former resident of Suez, April 2, 2021.

⁴⁶⁰ Although *Egyptiots* were a good fit for this job due to their skills and familiarity with the sea, their actions and demands have not always been welcomed by the Company. *Egyptiots* were some of the pioneers in strikes and labor movements in the 1880s and 1890s, and had been often characterized as ‘troublemakers.’ Thus, in some cases, they were laid off from their work and faced deportation. On this matter, see: Huber, *Channeling Mobilities*, 113-115.

⁴⁶¹ The terms ‘racial,’ ‘gender,’ and ‘Europeans’ were originally stated in quotation marks in the article. Curli, “Dames Employées,” 553-576.

⁴⁶² In 1946, the Works and the Technical Services became one department. The Works included annexed building sites and workshops. Besides the Administration that was first located in Alexandria and then Cairo, all other departments were located in Ismailia. *Ibid.*, 557.

engineers and technical staff.⁴⁶³ Egyptians were mainly the unskilled labor force. The employees with the most prestigious jobs, such as the pilots, were employed by the second largest department, the Transit Service. This department dealt with navigation, radio communications and other services. The *Egyptiots* who occupied positions in the Transit usually enjoyed higher wages, and were employed as sailors and skilled mechanics, amongst others. Lastly, the Administration comprised mainly French employees.⁴⁶⁴

Some of my interviewees commented that class divisions and discrimination were striking among employees at the Suez Canal Company, since primarily the French, who held higher positions, looked down on other communities, including the islander *Egyptiots*, as they considered them to be of lower status and uneducated.⁴⁶⁵ Indeed, most of the *Egyptiot* labor did not have titles or higher education, but they did have manual skills and knowledge. The discrimination was to such an extent that employees⁴⁶⁶ at the Canal Company were forced to use different beaches for leisure. One was for the manual workers (*ergates*), including *Egyptiots* from the islands and Egypt, and the other for the highly skilled staff, like the foreign pilots who were mostly French.⁴⁶⁷

Many *Egyptiots* continued to work for the Suez Canal Company in the 1950s and 1960s,⁴⁶⁸ in both low and high positions, and until today some still receive their pensions from France.⁴⁶⁹ Besides working for the Suez Canal Company, in the same period, *Egyptiots* were employed by companies like Shell, Wars and Semco, to name but a few, in which they

⁴⁶³ Curli, "Dames Employées," 557.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 558.

⁴⁶⁵ Four telephone interviews with *Egyptiots* who were based in Athens and originally came from Suez, Port-Said and Ismailia, April 2021.

⁴⁶⁶ I use employees here as a general category, including both skilled and unskilled labor force.

⁴⁶⁷ Four telephone interviews with *Egyptiots* who were based in Athens and originally came from Suez, Port-Said and Ismailia, April 2021.

⁴⁶⁸ The Suez Canal Company was nationalized by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1956.

⁴⁶⁹ The pensions were mentioned in the telephone interviews I had with some *Egyptiots* from the Suez Canal region. Four telephone interviews with *Egyptiots* who were based in Athens and originally came from Suez, Port-Said and Ismailia, April 2021.

held positions as mechanics, engineers and accountants.⁴⁷⁰ In few cases, *Egyptiots* appeared to work for the Spyros Spathis company a Greek-owned soda company, the first one to be established in Egypt in 1920.⁴⁷¹ Spyros Spathis, born in 1885 in Greece, came to Egypt when he was fifteen years old. By 1920, he established a soda company in Cairo, which by that time had under its employment about 150 workers, many of them *Egyptiots*.⁴⁷²

The Categories of Employment

Egyptiots' employment status and working environments not only shed light on the lived experiences of labor and class amongst the Suez Canal region *Egyptiots*, but also highlights the differences and similarities among *Egyptiot* communities throughout Egypt. For example, as Table 3:4 indicated, the categories of shopkeepers and manufacturers that were prominent among the Cairo and Alexandria based *Egyptiots* either appear in limited numbers or not at all among the Suez Canal region *Egyptiots*, indicating the class and labor differences among them.⁴⁷³

On the other hand, as in the case of Alexandria and Cairo, here too the category of 'employees' appears most commonly in the archival material, highlighting the low- and middle-class nature of the community (Table 3:4).⁴⁷⁴ Oftentimes, it was under the general

⁴⁷⁰ *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴⁷¹ Only three cases mentioned Spathis as their employer, but most probably more *Egyptiots* worked for this company without indicating it on their cards, instead stating simply 'employee.' Here I listed only those cases that explicitly stated that they worked for Spathis. Ibid.

⁴⁷² The lemony soda drink became very popular throughout Egypt, delivering its products from Alexandria all the way down to Aswan and to more remote places in Upper Egypt. "Spiros Spathis First Soda Water," Spiros Spathis, accessed June 10, 2021, <http://spirospathis.com/#About>. In order to stress the popularity of the Spathis soda drink, anecdotal sources claimed that the soda was the favorite drink of Umm Kulthoum, the famous singer who flourished in the 1950s and 1960s and has been considered a national icon for Egypt.

⁴⁷³ Only a few *Egyptiots* in the Suez Canal region appeared to have owned bakeries and other shops. The category of the shopkeepers existed, but it was very limited among the archival sources at the Canal. The category of manufacturers was not registered among the sources I examined. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ I have treated separately those *Egyptiots* who were working as employees for the community's institutions, as their field differed from those working for an industry or company. Under the category 'community employees' there were *Egyptiots* registered as school teachers, secretaries and priests. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

term *'muwazzaf'* in Arabic or *'ypallēlos'* in Greek, without specifying which type of employee the person was, making this category very ambiguous. In some cases, the occupation of the employee was specified under the categories of sailor, seaman and diver, pilot, mechanic and worker, among others. Some of these *Egyptiots* held managerial positions, having *'ra'īs'* next to the profession.

According to the 1960s archival records, there were several chief mechanics and pilots (captains) enlisted among them, showing that *Egyptiots* could rank high in a company, regardless of their origins.⁴⁷⁵ However, the amount of these registrations was limited, indicating that a number of them held high technical or managerial positions, but most were employees, skilled and unskilled/manual workers. Hence, their social and economic stratification varied, with multiple hierarchies being at stake.⁴⁷⁶

The category of 'employees' sometimes intermixed with that of 'mechanics,' meaning that many employees in companies held the position of mechanic.⁴⁷⁷ The category of mechanics was the second largest category in the 1960s, as in the case of the Alexandrian *Egyptiots* during the 1970s, indicating some similarities between the port cities when it comes to *Egyptiots'* labor activities. The category appeared as a general term *'mīkānīk'* in Arabic, or

⁴⁷⁵ *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

⁴⁷⁶ According to the archival records, most *Egyptiots* lived in the cities of Suez, Port Tawfik, Port Said and Ismailia. In some registrations, the About Factory and the residence of the Suez Canal Company (*akinēton organismou diōrygas-P. Tawfik/ 'imāra hayiya*) were indicated as the place of residence of people working there. This number was limited though in comparison to the private residences found in the abovementioned cities. Ibid. However, it was a common practice for foreign employees to reside in a company's apartments, even though the number of *Egyptiots* who resided in company buildings in the cities of the Canal Zone was not that large at this time. Hanan Hammad shows that in the late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century in al-Mahalla, many foreign employees, among them *Egyptiots* (who were the majority), resided in the al-Sharika section that the Company built for its employees. Hammad, "Mechanizing People," 27.

⁴⁷⁷ In many cases, the student card registration from the *koinotēta's* school of Suez and Port Tewfik had more general info on the father's occupation, than the health ID card in Arabic, *shahāda al-milāād*, which most of the times was more detailed on the occupation (specific occupation, location etc.). For example, someone could appear on the student's card registration as an employee, but on the health ID his occupation could be a mechanic working for Shell. Nonetheless, I decided to treat these two categories separately, as not all employees were mechanics and not all mechanics were working for specific companies. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētas Kairou.

sometimes under the specific title of ship mechanic, as many of the *Egyptiots* worked for the shipping industry. The popularity of work in the shipping industry was shown also in the category of ‘sailors/navigators & divers,’ which appeared high in the archival records.

The term ‘mechanic’ appeared most of the time unspecified and unlinked to a company. Thus, I assume that mechanics could be *Egyptiots* that were self-employed and exercised the profession of the mechanic, or *Egyptiots* that worked as mechanics in Egyptian or foreign companies and industries. As in the category of ‘employees,’ here too some mechanics held high skilled positions, as they would be defined as *‘ra`īs mīkānīk’* that can be translated as chief mechanic.

Besides being employees or mechanics, most *Egyptiots* occupied technical professions. The most popular were electrician, fitter, boilermaker, lubricator, telephonist, builder and carpenter, among others. The nature of the technical professions in the Canal Zone differed to some extent from those in Alexandria, as the shipping industry and construction companies at the Canal needed a different type of personnel. For example, the professions of lubricator and boiler maker did not appear at all in the archives I examined in Alexandria. Perhaps, *Egyptiots* performed those roles there too, but in a limited number, or they were registered under the general category of ‘mechanic’. In addition, and in contrast to Alexandria, the category of ‘traders’ was listed low among registered occupations, as shown previously in Table 3:4. This indicated that in the 1960s the *Egyptiots* at the Canal were not that invested in this profession, compared to those in Alexandria.⁴⁷⁸ The low ranking of this profession was shown in the case of an *Egyptiot* who was a commercial trader in Alexandria, but who upon his arrival in the Suez registered and worked as an electrician.⁴⁷⁹ Relocation

⁴⁷⁸ Half of those registrations were grocery traders and the other half was undefined. *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētās Kairou.

⁴⁷⁹ *Biṭāqa madrasīya/atomiko deltio mathētou*, *Koinotēta* Suez, file: Scholika, 1961-1963; 1966-1967; file: Mathētes, 1961-1963; 1966-1967. Archeio Ellēnikēs Koinotētās Kairou.

was a common phenomenon for *Egyptiots* and others, especially from the cities of Alexandria and Cairo to the Canal Zone.⁴⁸⁰ It often meant change in their labor activities, due to the difficulty of finding the same job in the new environment or the irrelevance of their old profession in the new location, and thus it required adjustment to a new environment. Of course, one cannot be sure that the person switched jobs because he was unable to fulfil his old position. Other reasons, like personal preferences and a better, more secure job could play a role too. Nevertheless, the limited number of traders compared to the high number of technical professions, like electricians, indicated the popularity of the latter and the more chances one might have to find a job in this field than in trade. Hence, relocation from other Egyptian cities to the Canal Zone, as well as the nature of the shipping industry and construction companies, and their subsequent demands on specialized personnel, highlighted the differences among the *Egyptiots'* working environments, namely between Cairo, Alexandria and the Suez Canal cities.

Conclusion

Labor practices among *Egyptiots* in the Canal cities were characterized by working-class networks, employed mainly by the Suez Canal Company, and by foreign- or Greek-owned contractor companies. Being mostly employed in the shipping industry and construction, *Egyptiots* occupied technical professions, as mechanics, electricians or seamen on ships. As in the communities in Cairo and Alexandria, here too, the category of employees appeared most often in the archival material discussed here and in the previous chapter, indicating the lower- and middle-class nature of the *Egyptiot* communities. Nevertheless, *Egyptiots* also

⁴⁸⁰ Prior to 1962, many *Egyptiots* relocated from Alexandria and Cairo to the Canal zone to be employed at the British military bases in that region, due to the post-World War II unemployment. Ntalachanis, "Les archives grecques," 310.

occupied higher positions, like those of pilots and chief mechanics, highlighting the social and economic stratification of the community and the many hierarchies at play. These hierarchies were also expressed, perhaps to a greater degree, between *Egyptiots* and other communities, like the French, especially in the first decades of the 20th century.

Egyptiots in the Canal cities differed in their experiences of citizenship, access to state resources, and degree of mobility, compared to the communities in Alexandria and Cairo. Indeed, Greek citizenship remained the highest in number across all communities. However, the higher rate of Egyptian citizenship stands out in the cities of the Canal, manifesting the range of historical experiences, shaped by political and economic developments in Egypt and the broader Eastern Mediterranean. The end of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Egyptian state, the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973, and the change in the labor laws in the 1950s and 1960s, among others, impacted *Egyptiots* and others who lived in Egypt at that time. The particular impact on the Suez Canal cities, however, was evident in the *Egyptiot* community's cohesion, as most of them evacuated the cities in 1967 and almost everyone else followed in 1973. Therefore, these economic and political factors, and the social processes the community underwent, defined its relation with the Egyptian post-colonial state. They characterized *Egyptiots'* geographic and social mobility, employment opportunities and access to Egyptian citizenship, and, consequently, their social and economic presence in Egypt.