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Beyond departure: the Greek in Egypt, 1962-1976

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CONCLUSION

In scholarly and popular studies, the presence of the *Egyptiot* community in Egypt has been depicted with limitations, as most of the historiography narrated it either until the end of the Capitulations (1937), or until its departure. Consequently, this analysis treated the *Egyptiot* community either as a foreign community whose presence stopped once the economic and political benefits to foreigners ended, or as a community that came to an end with its demographic diminution. By moving beyond the period of the massive departures, my work considers the diverse strategies and opportunities but also the obstacles and struggles *Egyptiots* encountered in a post-colonial environment in which the Egyptian national discourse was reconstructing the boundaries and space of Egyptian identity, implementing a variety of national policies.

This dissertation has examined the continued, yet hitherto overlooked, engagement of the *Egyptiot* community in Egypt from the period after the *en masse* departure of most of its members (1962), until the implementation of the *infitāh* policies in 1976 by Anwar Sadat. *Beyond Departure: The Greeks in Egypt, 1962-1976* explored the *Egyptiots*' multiple personal, local and institutional histories that make up the *Egyptiot* presence in history after 1962. It revealed the diversity of *Egyptiot* experiences based on geographical, socioeconomic and individual context. It analyzed the motivations and strategies they employed to respond to the economic and social changes in Egyptian society, such as the end of the Capitulations, WWI and WWII, the formation of the post-colonial state, and the 1961 Nationalization laws, among others, and the relations these events formed between Egyptian nationals and non-nationals and the Egyptian state. It also explored how *Egyptiots* negotiated their presence, identity and feelings of belonging, in mind and practice, as a diaspora with a transnational agency. It did so by analyzing both archival material from different institutions in Egypt and Greece, and oral sources comprising interviews conducted with *Egyptiots* in these two

countries. Therefore, it articulated the several facets of the social and economic history of the *Egyptiot* community within the Egyptian post-colonial state, and by doing so, it included the *Egyptiot* presence within Greek and Egyptian historiographies.

Part I discussed the personal and local histories of *Egyptiots* in Alexandria, Cairo, and the Suez Canal region. It showed how the social, economic, and political changes and the departures of the largest part of the *Egyptiot* community not only brought challenges and obstacles, but also offered opportunities to the remaining *Egyptiots*. Chapter One shed light on the way *Egyptiots* negotiated their presence on an individual level, through their stories of remaining. Their stories of property ownership, employment, citizenship, financial struggle, family attachment, and studies anchored *Egyptiots*' presence in Egypt. Their stories were shaped by the *Egyptiots*' collective memory and raised questions regarding conceptions of identity and belonging, both in Egypt and Greece. Their decisions to remain were defined by both their economic and social situations and by the ways they perceived their life at that stage. For some, remaining in Egypt was not the first option. Others even departed and then returned, reassessing their economic and personal situations. *Egyptiots* chose to remain and tried to find the best solutions for themselves and their families to make their presence permanent in the country.

Chapter Two discussed the political, economic and social factors that shaped *Egyptiots*' economic activities in Alexandria and Cairo. The economic crisis in 1929, the end of the Capitulations in 1937, the formation of the post-colonial Egyptian state, and the economic policies of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Decree 263/1960 and the 1961 Nationalization law, together with the *infitāh* policies in the 1970s, demarcated *Egyptiot* economic activities in these two cities. However, the impact of these developments was not unified either between these two communities or within them. With regards to the Alexandrian *Egyptiots*, categories of labor, such as cotton and tobacco traders, and green

grocers experienced a great decline after the 1930s, primarily due to the crisis in 1929 and the government's anti-foreign measures in the 1930s. Their decline continued in the following years, eliminating the presence of the former and decreasing dramatically the activities of the latter. On the other hand, the activities of small and medium scale industries and factories increased in the 1960s and 1970s, as they were not nationalized by the state and some of them even flourished due to the *infītāh* policies. The *Egyptiots* in Cairo sustained an active network of shopkeepers, and especially of greengrocers, prior to and after 1962. They demonstrated more resilience to economic and social change, compared to their fellows in Alexandria, as they were more integrated into the Egyptian capital and their stores were more spread throughout the city. The Cairo-based *Egyptiots* invested in the tourism business, following its popularity in Egypt in the late 1960s, and found a new orientation in the labor market in order to adjust to its new demands. Besides these differences between the Cairo- and Alexandria-based *Egyptiots*, a strong commonality was their vast employment in positions of employees in shops, companies, industries and the *koinotēta*'s institutions, an element that defined the predominant low- and middle-class character of these communities. In addition, they had similar experiences with Egyptian citizenship, as only a limited number obtained it, in contrast to the Suez Canal region *Egyptiots*.

Chapter Three examined how social processes, such as migration and post-colonialism, and political and economic developments, like the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956, the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973, and the labor laws in the 1960s, shaped *Egyptiots*' experiences of class, employment, citizenship and mobility, and the community's access to the state's resources. It discussed how these developments enabled or restrained their labor practices, impacted the community's cohesion in the Canal Zone and defined its relations with the post-colonial Egyptian state. Hence, it explored ways in which these developments determined *Egyptiots*' decisions to remain in or leave Egypt.

The *Egyptiots* in the Suez Canal region were characterized primarily by working-class networks, as they exercised mostly technical professions in the shipping industry. Like the other two communities, the vast majority of them were employees, highlighting once again the low- and middle-class nature of these three communities. Nonetheless, hierarchies and differences in *Egyptiots*' socioeconomic stratification were also present, depicting their diverse experiences in economic and social terms. *Egyptiots* in the Canal Zone also expressed a difference compared to the other two communities with regards to Egyptian citizenship. Even though Greek citizens were still the highest in number, Egyptian citizenship had a considerable record, compared to the other two communities. This demonstrated how economic and political developments both in Egypt and the broader Mediterranean formed different historical experiences among the three communities in Egypt.

Part II discussed how *Egyptiots* responded to economic, social and political changes on an institutional level. Specifically, it focused on the case of the Alexandrian *koinotēta*, EKA, which was the *Egyptiots*' oldest and most prestigious representative body, being the main receiver of Greek government subsidies. Chapter Four examined the EKA's role and agency through the management of its institutional property and human resources. By looking at the strategies and goals the EKA undertook concerning its property, this chapter analyzed how it operated as a local and diasporic institution in periods of shrinkage. It demonstrated that the EKA maintained and guaranteed its agency and social, political and economic capital, even though it faced serious financial difficulties. The continuous support of the Greek government, associations and individuals, as well as its mergers with other *koinotētes*, allowed the EKA to grow in power and responsibility. In addition, the institution was able to regain its property and autonomy due to the shift in government policies, from Gamal Abdel Nasser's 1960s strict land reforms to more lenient agricultural policies of Anwar Sadat in the 1970s. Hence, being aware of its reputation and agency, and gaining back

its property, the EKA managed to preserve its presence in Egypt and maintained its role as the ‘fashioner’ of the *Egyptiot* community.

Chapter Five discussed the EKA’s concerns and adjustment policies on two important educational matters that related to the labor market: the learning of the Arabic language, and technical education. It examined how the EKA reevaluated its educational system during Gamal Abdel Nasser’s period, but changed its attitude once Anwar Sadat implemented more lenient policies on this matter. The shift in educational policies and the moral and financial support the EKA received from the Greek government left the institution with a great deal of power to negotiate its educational affairs. The EKA manifested its autonomy and independent decision making not only towards the Egyptian government, but also towards its members and the *Egyptiot koinotēta* in Cairo. Together with the previous chapter, chapter five demonstrated that the EKA’s power did not necessarily contract after the departure of most of its members. The moral and financial support the EKA was granted by the Greek government and the shift in policies by Anwar Sadat in the 1970s enabled the EKA to maintain its cultural, economic and political capital, negotiate its place and fashion the community’s identifications and belonging.

Therefore, *Beyond Departure* makes two major interventions. It contributes to both Egyptian and Greek histories, while navigating articulations of belonging, identity and power. Firstly, my work did not treat the *Egyptiots* as another foreign community in Egyptian history. Rather, I demonstrated through this project *Egyptiots*’ contribution in the making of the Egyptian national space. Secondly, this research inserts *Egyptiots* within the larger body of scholarship that historicizes the Greek diaspora, by exploring the several articulations of power and imaginations of belonging and identity which diasporic communities and their institutions can have. Starting from a merchant community with a foreign status, the *Egyptiots* transformed themselves into an integrated minority within the Egyptian national

space, keeping at the same time their transnational agency as a diaspora. This reading of the *Egyptiot* presence acknowledges the complexity of their own self-identifications that were not always represented by (and fall under) the Greek and Egyptian national identity categories.