

# Ethnic Minorities in Alexandria, Egypt: Findings from the 1947 and 1960 Population Censuses\*

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## Abstract

Historically, Egypt was a land of immigrants not emigrants; a receiving rather than a sending country. Egypt has been an area of international migration (migration from the eastern and the north-eastern Mediterranean countries to Egypt). In the past, foreigners were coming to Egypt while Egyptians rarely migrated abroad till the mid-1950s. Europeans used to migrate to Egypt and they formed successful minorities in Alexandria and Cairo until early fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this paper, an attempt is made to analyze ethnic minorities who were living in Alexandria, Egypt using data from the 1947 and 1960 Population Censuses. The data of the census provide important aspects of the composition of minorities in Alexandria that were not researched before. The census provides data on population composition by age and sex, religious affiliation, marital status, and nationality. The 1960 Census indicates a dramatic decrease of the number and the percent of non-citizens in Alexandria.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Minorities, Metropolitan Cities, Alexandria, Migration, Egypt.

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\* Multi-ethnic cities in the Mediterranean world. History, culture, heritage. Genoa, 4-5 June 2018.

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## 1. Introduction

Historically, Egypt was a land of immigrants not emigrants; a receiving rather than a sending country. Egypt has been an area of international migration (migration from the eastern and the north-eastern Mediterranean countries to Egypt). In the past, foreigners were coming to Egypt while Egyptians rarely migrated abroad till the mid-1950s. Europeans used to migrate to Egypt and they formed successful minorities in Alexandria and Cairo until early fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zohry, 2014).

In this paper, an attempt is made to analyze ethnic minorities who were living in Alexandria, Egypt using data from the 1947 and 1960 Population Censuses. The data of the census provide important aspects of the composition of minorities in Alexandria that were not researched before. The census provides data on population composition by age and sex, religious affiliation, marital status, and nationality. The 1960 Census indicates a dramatic decrease of the number and the percent of non-citizens in Alexandria.

## 2. Socio-Cultural life of Ethnic Minorities in Alexandria

Under the directions of its modern founder, Mohamed Ali (reigned 1805–1848), Alexandria grew into a pro-European city that was the financial and cultural capital of Egypt (Awad and Hamouda, 2012). Until the Nasser's 1952 revolution, non-Egyptians in Alexandria have had contributed to the socio-cultural life of Alexandria through the foundation of clubs and schools such as the Greek Maritime Club Alexandria (founded in 1909), Italian and Greek schools and churches, and European-style restaurants and hairdressing and beauty shops. Moreover, non-Egyptians contributed to the foundation and the development of the Egyptian cinema industry, which started in the eve of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Alexandria, where most of the technicians working in the cinema industry at that time were non-Egyptians. One of the most famous cinema directors, for example, was Togo Mizrahi (1901-1986); Egyptian citizen of Italian origin, born in Alexandria and directed 29 Egyptian movies between 1930 and 1944.

Another example of the contribution of non-Egyptians in Alexandria to the socio-cultural life is the story of the *Behna Brothers*, Michael and George Behna. Behna Brothers belonged to a family that originally came from Aleppo and settled in Alexandria. They produced the first Egyptian musical film, *Song of the Heart* (Ounchoudat Al Fou'âd) in 1932. By 1961, Behna Brothers had become the main film distributors in the Arab world and had offices in Alexandria, Cairo, Baghdad, Khartoum, Beirut and Damascus (Awad and Hamouda, 2012).

The Egyptian Greek poet, Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933) is another iconic figure of Alexandria. Cavafy was born in Alexandria to Greek parents. Cavafy's home in Alexandria was converted into a museum. The museum holds several of Cavafy's sketches and original manuscripts as well as containing several pictures and portraits of and by Cavafy.

### **3. Ethnic Minorities in Alexandria before and after the 1952 Revolution**

The Egyptian revolution led by Nasser (1952) that overthrew the monarchy on July 23, and the independence from British colonization (1956) make the boundary between two different phases in the Egyptian history. While the Egyptian monarchy was more open to the West, mainly Europe and USA, Nasser regarded Egypt as the leader of the Arab states and saw Egypt's role as promoting Arab solidarity against both the West and Israel. The new tendency of Nasser made it difficult for non-Egyptians to keep enjoying equal rights as their neighbors; Egyptian citizens. Moreover, the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, in addition to the Suez War 1956 (Second Arab–Israeli War), all of these events were linked to Judaism, so that Israeli/Jewish Egyptians and non-Egyptians in Egypt have had the feeling that they are accused of supporting the State of Israel which was the main reason of migration and re-migration of Egyptian and non-Egyptian Jewish after the Nasser's revolution.

Another important reason for the decreasing number of non-Egyptian minorities after the revolution in Egypt in general and in Alexandria in specific, is the decreasing importance of Alexandria as the main port and commercial capital of Egypt in favor of Cairo. This may be attributed to the declining importance of maritime transport for individuals in favor of aviation. The concentration of political and economic power in Cairo led to the declining importance of Alexandria at that time. This is in addition to Nasser's adherence to the socialist approach and the weakening of the economy due to war and hostility to the West.

Moreover, ethnic minorities in Alexandria were more sensitive to economic volatility due to the fact that most of them, if not all, were working in the private sector which was not likely to be supported by a socialist regime at that time.

The Egyptian Censuses of 1947 and 1960 reveal important information about Egyptians as well as non-Egyptians in Alexandria. They provide information about the population by nationality and Sex, age structure, religious affiliation,

economic activity, and many other characteristics. Some of these characteristics are explored in this section.

### **3.1 Non-Egyptians in 1947 and 1960**

Egyptians comprised 93.1 percent of the population of Alexandria in 1947. In 1960 the percent of Egyptian population increased to 97.1 percent. This was not mainly due to the high fertility rates of Egyptians, compared to non-Egyptians, but namely to the fact that non-Egyptians' migration to origin or to other countries. Associated with their decreasing percentage share to the total population, the absolute number of non-Egyptians decreased from 63.5 thousand to 45.6 thousand between 1947 and 1960.

As for the nationalities of non-Egyptians, and as shown in Table 2 below, one can notice that the prime non-Egyptian nationalities in Alexandria were Greeks and Italians in both 1947 and 1960 censuses. With respect to the 1947 data, Greeks were representing almost 50 percent of non-Egyptians with about 31 thousand Greeks. Italians were representing about 20 percent of non-Egyptians with more than 12 thousand Italians. Greeks and Italians represented about 70 percent of non-Egyptians in Alexandria in 1947. Brits ranked third with about 15 percent of non-Egyptians with about 10 thousand. Other non-Egyptians included French (3.3 thousand), Turks (2 thousand), and other non-Arab nationalities (about 4 thousand). In 1947, Arabs in Alexandria comprised less than 3 percent of non-Egyptians.

As mentioned above, in 1960, the total number of foreigners decreased to 45.6 thousand. Without the intervening factors occurred between the two censuses (1947 and 1960) , and assuming the same percent of non-Egyptians in Alexandria, the total number of foreigners in Alexandria in 1960 could have reached to a level of 104.6 thousand or 6.9 percent of the total population of 1960, as was the percent in 1947. The reported number of non-Egyptians in Alexandria in 1960 was actually less than 50 percent of the above estimated number (45.6 thousand only). Despite the decreasing number of non-Egyptians in Alexandria in 1960, Greeks comprised 54 percent of non-Egyptians, which

actually means a persistence by Greeks – or Greek Egyptians - to continue living in Alexandria despite the political and economic changes occurred in Egypt between 1947 and 1960. At the same time, the percent of Italians decreased to 14 percent, while other non-Arabs represented 14 percent. Arab non-Egyptians increased from less than 3 percent in 1947 to about 19 percent in 1960. Part of this increase was due to the independence of the Sudan from Egypt in 1956 and the Palestinian refugees (5.8 and 3.4 percent for the two nationalities respectively). Other Arabs increased from 0.2 to 5.3 percent between the two censuses. This may be attributed, in part, to the Arabism tendency by the Nasser regime at that time.

**Table 1**  
**Population by Nationality and Sex, Alexandria (1947-1960)**

Nationality	1947				1960			
	Males	Females	Total	Percent	Males	Females	Total	Percent
Egyptians	434,061	421,428	855,489	93.1	748311	723,216	1,471,527	97.1
Syrians	196	197	393	0.0	724	487	1,211	0.1
Lebanese	432	421	853	0.1	--	--	--	--
Palestinians	97	67	164	0.0	1211	336	1,547	0.1
Sudanese	--	--	--	--	1831	824	2,655	0.2
Other Arabs	101	54	155	0.0	1339	1,059	2,398	0.2
Italians	5,692	6,678	12,370	1.3	2790	3,608	6,398	0.4
Brits	4,864	4,795	9,659	1.1	--	--	--	--
Turks	933	1,070	2,003	0.2	--	--	--	--
French	1,495	1,764	3,259	0.4	--	--	--	--
Greeks	14,737	16,016	30,753	3.3	11224	13,385	24,609	1.6
Other non-Arabs	2,034	1,891	3,925	0.4	2855	3,473	6,328	0.4
Unknown Nationalities	1	0	1	0.0	295	189	484	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>464,643</b>	<b>454,381</b>	<b>919,024</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>769705</b>	<b>746,529</b>	<b>1,516,234</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Calculated from Egypt Population Censuses 1947 and 1960

**Table 2**  
**Non-Egyptian Population by Nationality and Sex, Alexandria (1947-1960)**

Nationality	1947				1960			
	Males	Females	Total	Percent	Males	Females	Total	Percent
Syrians	196	197	393	0.6	724	487	1,211	2.7
Lebanese	432	421	853	1.3	NA	NA	NA	NA
Palestinians	97	67	164	0.3	1211	336	1,547	3.4
Sudanese	--	--	--	--	1831	824	2,655	5.8
Other Arabs	101	54	155	0.2	1339	1,059	2,398	5.3
Italians	5,692	6,678	12,370	19.5	2790	3,608	6,398	14.0
Brits	4,864	4,795	9,659	15.2	--	--	--	--
Turks	933	1,070	2,003	3.2	--	--	--	--
French	1,495	1,764	3,259	5.1	--	--	--	--
Greeks	14,737	16,016	30,753	48.4	11224	13,385	24,609	53.9
Other non-Arabs	2,034	1,891	3,925	6.2	2855	3,473	6,328	13.9
Unknown Nationalities	1	0	1	0.0	295	189	484	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,582</b>	<b>32,953</b>	<b>63,535</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>22,269</b>	<b>23,361</b>	<b>45,630</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Calculated from Egypt Population Censuses 1947 and 1960.

### **3.2 Age and Sex Composition of Egyptians and Non-Egyptians**

The age and sex composition of non-Egyptians in 1947 and 1960 censuses indicate that the migration of non-Egyptians to Alexandria is mainly a settlement migration. It was a family migration, rather than migration for work (See Tables 3a and 3b for more details about the age-sex composition of Egyptians and non-Egyptians in the two censuses).

The population pyramids of Egyptians and non-Egyptians in the censuses of 1947 and 1960 were constructed to provide a visual representation of the age structure of Egyptians and non-Egyptians in the two censuses. Despite the decrease of the percent and absolute number of non-Egyptians in Alexandria between 1947 and 1960, the population pyramid of non-Egyptians was almost the same, which reflects the family nature of migration/residence in Alexandria. One can easily notice that the population pyramids of Egyptians versus non-Egyptians are different. While the Egyptian pyramids in both years have a wide base, representing a young population with high fertility rates, the non-Egyptian population pyramids are slimmer which may reflect low fertility among non-Egyptians in Alexandria. In fact, the population pyramids of non-Egyptians in Alexandria are more to the shape of the population pyramids of the countries of origin of the majority of non-Egyptians; Greece and Italy. They are more demographically mature than the Egyptian population in the two censuses (See Figures 1, 2, and 3 below).



**Table 3a****Age and Sex Composition of Egyptians and Non-Egyptians, 1947 Census**

Age-Group	Egyptians			Non-Egyptians			Total		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
0-4	64,418	64,375	128,793	1,985	1,839	3,825	66,393	66,202	132,617
5-9	49,981	50,025	100,007	1,761	1,683	3,444	51,735	51,700	103,451
10-14	51,022	53,102	104,124	2,193	2,115	4,308	53,209	55,210	108,432
15-19	41,576	45,989	87,564	2,555	2,578	5,133	44,129	48,563	92,697
20-24	36,927	39,050	75,977	2,564	2,812	5,376	39,490	41,862	81,353
25-29	33,108	33,286	66,394	2,222	2,699	4,921	35,330	35,985	71,315
30-34	35,688	31,049	66,737	2,592	3,013	5,605	38,280	34,064	72,342
35-39	28,656	25,727	54,383	2,507	2,801	5,308	31,165	28,531	59,691
40-44	30,261	22,842	53,104	2,685	2,765	5,451	32,949	25,611	58,554
45-49	17,595	14,515	32,110	2,259	2,371	4,631	19,858	16,891	36,741
50-54	19,289	16,443	35,732	2,324	2,486	4,810	21,617	18,933	40,542
55-59	6,390	5,693	12,083	1,435	1,520	2,954	7,829	7,216	15,038
60-64	10,568	10,395	20,963	1,581	1,829	3,411	12,153	12,228	24,374
65-69	2,878	2,477	5,356	846	873	1,719	3,727	3,353	7,075
70-74	3,652	3,835	7,487	615	857	1,472	4,268	4,694	8,958
75+	2,051	2,625	4,676	457	711	1,168	2,509	3,338	5,847
<b>Total</b>	<b>434,061</b>	<b>421,428</b>	<b>855,489</b>	<b>30,582</b>	<b>32,953</b>	<b>63,535</b>	<b>464,643</b>	<b>454,381</b>	<b>919,024</b>

Source: Calculated from Egypt Population Census 1947.

**Table 3b****Age and Sex Composition of Egyptians and Non-Egyptians, 1960 Census**

Age-Group	Egyptians			Non-Egyptians			Total		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
0-4	116,535	111,896	228,432	1,167	1,073	2,240	117,707	112,969	230,672
5-9	115,170	110,068	225,239	1,360	1,294	2,654	116,534	111,362	227,892
10-14	96,289	98,475	194,764	1,636	1,517	3,153	97,928	99,992	197,918
15-19	63,546	66,158	129,704	1,427	1,427	2,854	64,974	67,585	132,558
20-24	55,887	55,455	111,342	1,511	1,315	2,826	57,398	56,770	114,168
25-29	49,130	56,943	106,073	1,287	1,553	2,840	50,417	58,496	108,912
30-34	55,092	48,692	103,785	1,437	1,743	3,180	56,529	50,436	106,965
35-39	45,649	44,428	90,078	1,567	1,741	3,308	47,216	46,169	93,386
40-44	41,063	31,128	72,191	1,568	1,722	3,290	42,631	32,850	75,482
45-49	29,062	27,030	56,092	1,670	1,870	3,540	30,731	28,900	59,633
50-54	29,155	24,779	53,934	1,827	1,914	3,741	30,980	26,693	57,675
55-59	16,204	13,609	29,813	1,361	1,460	2,821	17,563	15,069	32,634
60-64	17,990	16,241	34,231	1,399	1,652	3,051	19,387	17,893	37,282
65-69	6,914	5,822	12,736	824	1,006	1,830	7,736	6,828	14,566
70-74	6,158	6,849	13,007	710	989	1,699	6,867	7,838	14,707
75+	4,464	5,642	10,106	643	1,036	1,679	5,106	6,678	11,784
<b>Total</b>	<b>748,311</b>	<b>723,216</b>	<b>1,471,527</b>	<b>21,394</b>	<b>23,313</b>	<b>44,707</b>	<b>769,705</b>	<b>746,529</b>	<b>1,516,234</b>

Source: Calculated from Egypt Population Census 1960.

Figure 1a

Population Pyramid of Egyptians, Alexandria 1947

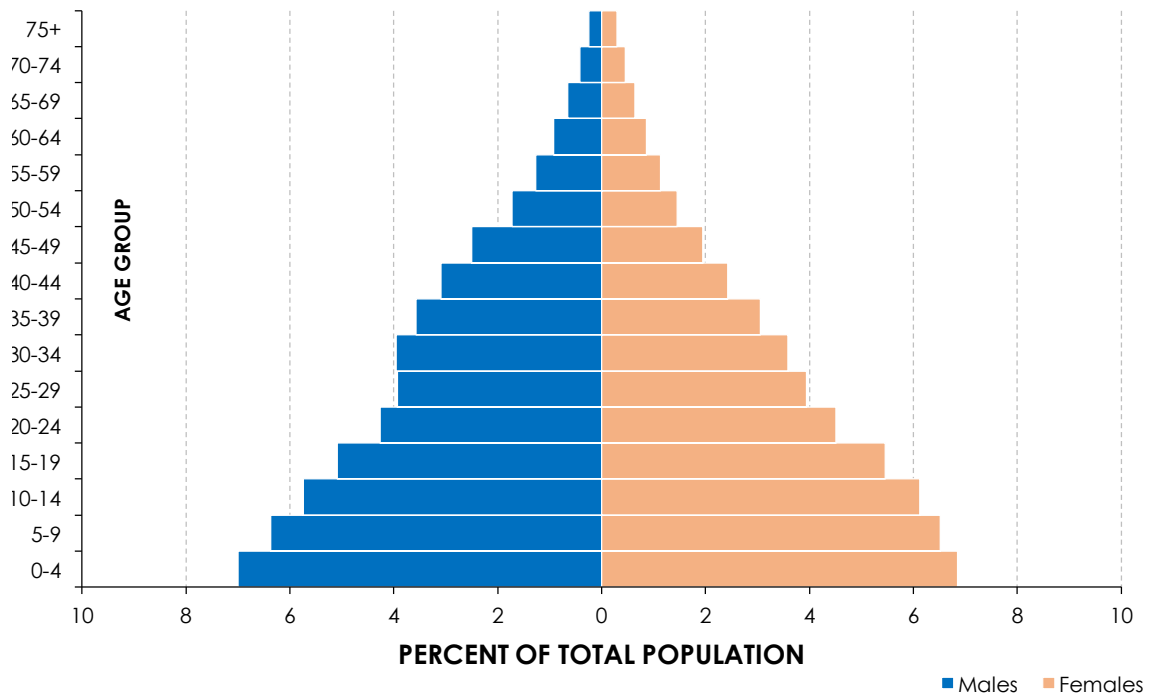


Figure 1b

Population Pyramid of Non-Egyptians, Alexandria 1947

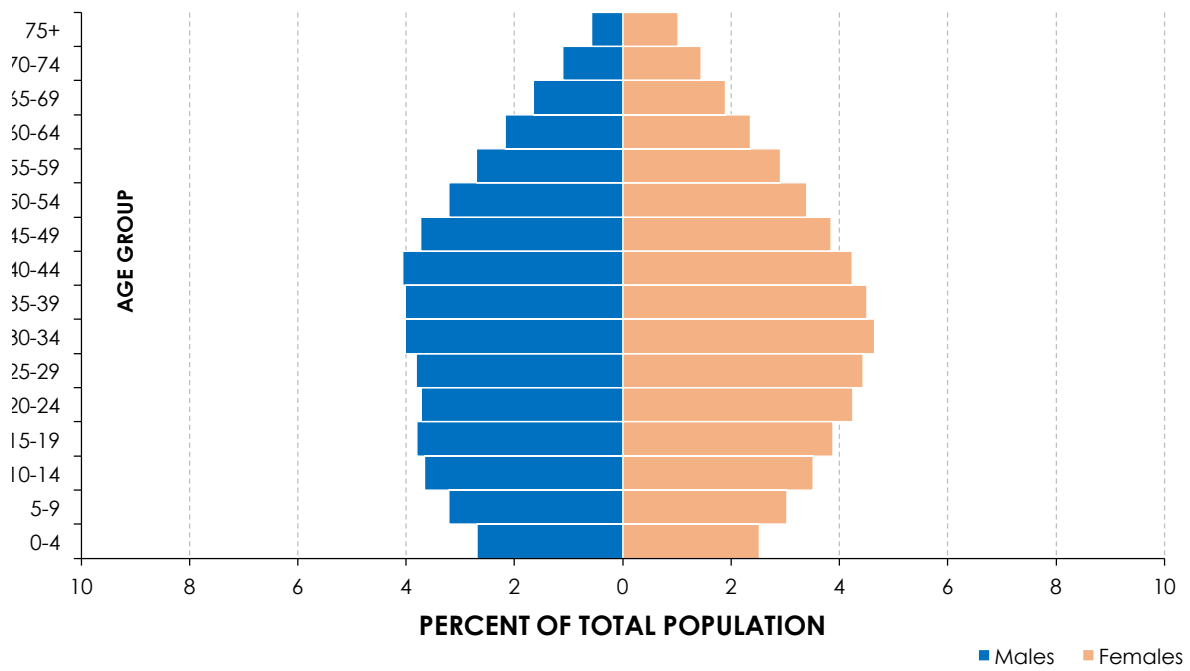


Figure 2a

Population Pyramid of Egyptians, Alexandria 1960

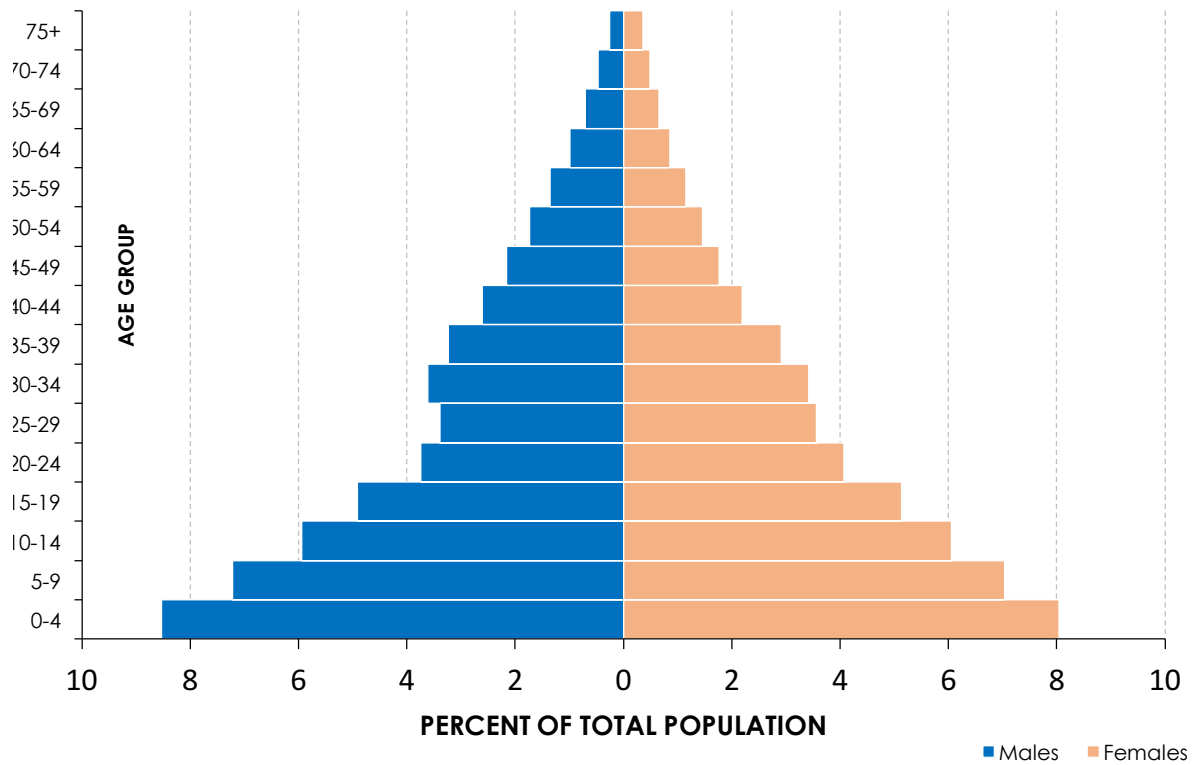
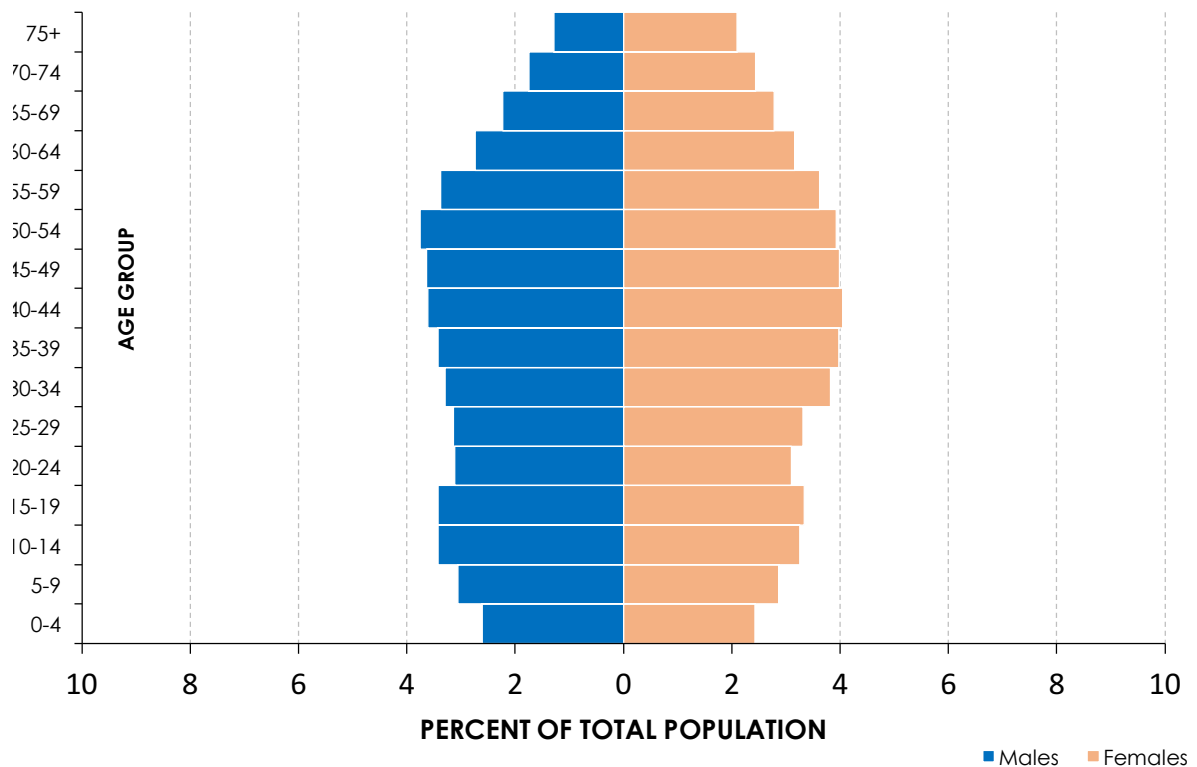
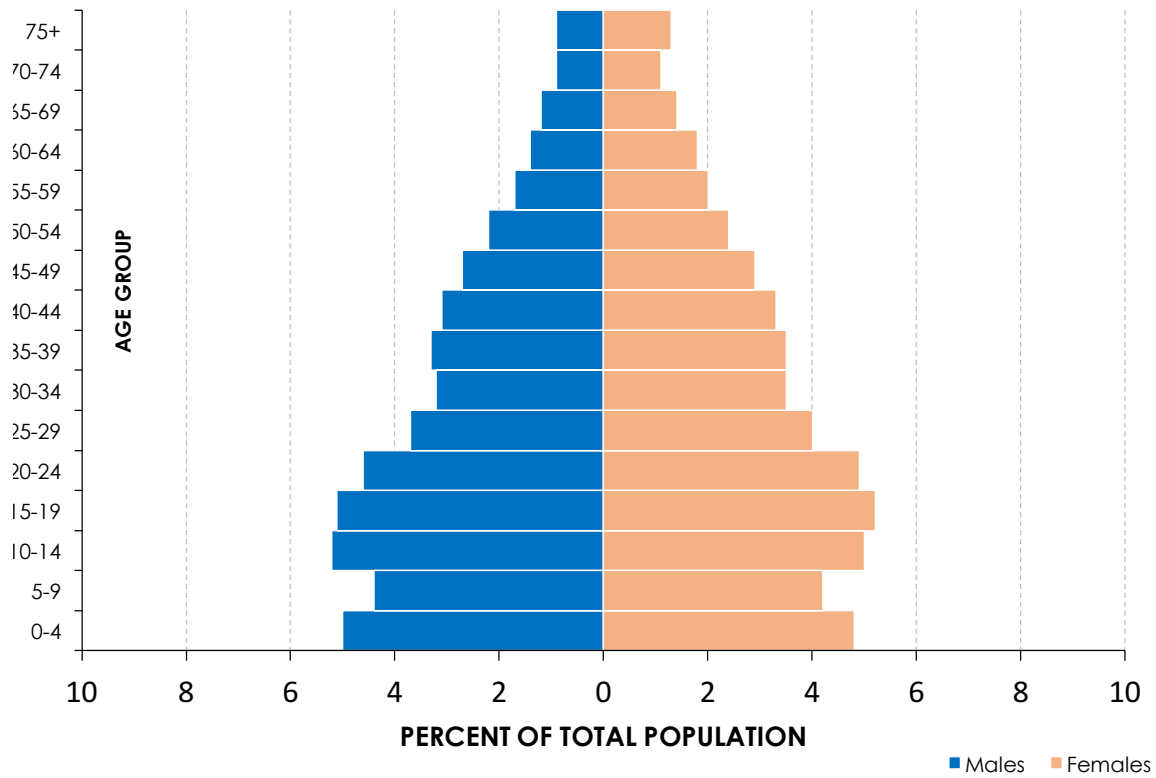


Figure 2b

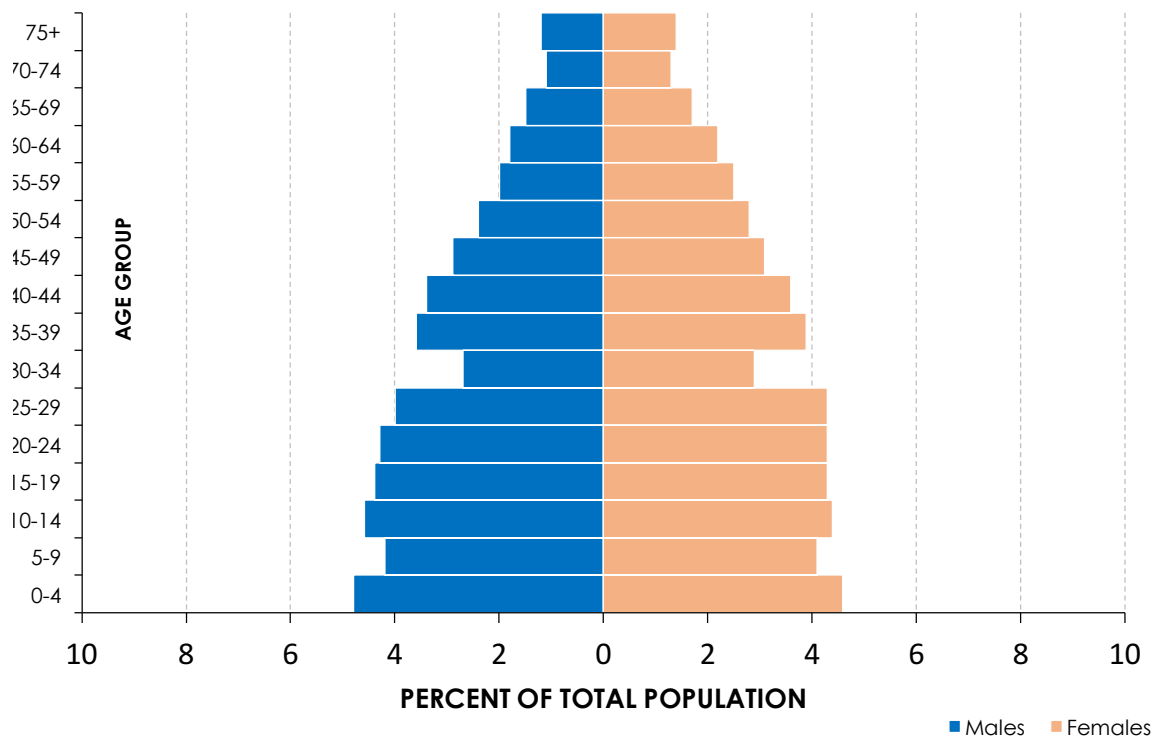
Population Pyramid of Non-Egyptians, Alexandria 1960



**Figure 3a**  
**Population Pyramid, Greece 1950**



**Figure 3b**  
**Population Pyramid, Italy 1950**



### **3. 3 Religious Composition of Egyptians and Non-Egyptians**

Despite the dissimilarity in the classification of religious affiliations in the censuses of 1947 and 1960, the two censuses provide important information about the religious affiliation of the population of Alexandria in the two points of time. Religious affiliation in the 1947 census data is more detailed than that of the 1960 data. While the classification of religion in 1960 data was only to the level of the main religions, the 1947 data provide more detail on the sects of Christianity and Judaism. Muslims in both censuses are provided without any classifications due to the universality of the Sunni sect in Egypt and the absence of the sectarian Sunni/Shiite debates at that time.

As for the religious affiliation of non-Egyptians in Alexandria in 1947, and as shown in Table 4a below, Christians comprised the vast majority of non-Egyptians with 88.2 percent of the total population, followed by Israelis (9.6 percent), while Muslims comprised only 1.8 percent. It is noticed also that Jewish were called "Israelis," a term that was replaced with "Jewish" in the successive census after the foundation of the State of Israel. The distribution of Israelis/Jewish by sect indicates that the vast majority of Israelis/Jewish were Rabbis (98.6 percent). As for the sectarian distribution of non-Egyptian Christians, one can notice that they echo/replicate nationalities with 63.3 percent Orthodox (mainly Greeks) and 31.0 percent Catholic (mainly Italians).

Moving to the religious affiliation of non-Egyptians in Alexandria in 1960, one can notice that Muslims increased to 12.8 percent. This increase is attributed, in part, to the separation/independence of the Sudan and counting Sudanese as non-Egyptians. Christianity remained the prime religion for non-Egyptians with 83.3 percent. Greeks and Italians comprised more than 80 percent of non-Egyptian Christians.

**Table 4a**

**Population by Nationality and Religious Affiliation, Alexandria 1947**

Religious Affiliation	Sect	Nationality		
		Egyptians	Non-Egyptians	
			Number	Percent
<b>Muslims</b>		<b>760,651</b>	<b>1152</b>	<b>1.8%</b>
Christians	Coptic Orthodox	59,487	0	0.0%
	Coptic Protestant	3,385	0	0.0%
	Coptic Catholic	7,491	0	0.0%
	Other Orthodox	4,579	35,482	63.3%
	Other Protestant	3,080	3,164	5.6%
	Other Catholic	1,487	17,401	31.0%
<b>Total Christians</b>		<b>79,509</b>	<b>56,047</b>	<b>88.2%</b>
Israelis	Rabbi	14,896	5,989	98.6%
	Karaite	161	82	1.4%
<b>Total Israelis</b>		<b>15,057</b>	<b>6,071</b>	<b>9.6%</b>
<b>Other Beliefs</b>		<b>272</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>0.4%</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>855,489</b>	<b>63,535</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

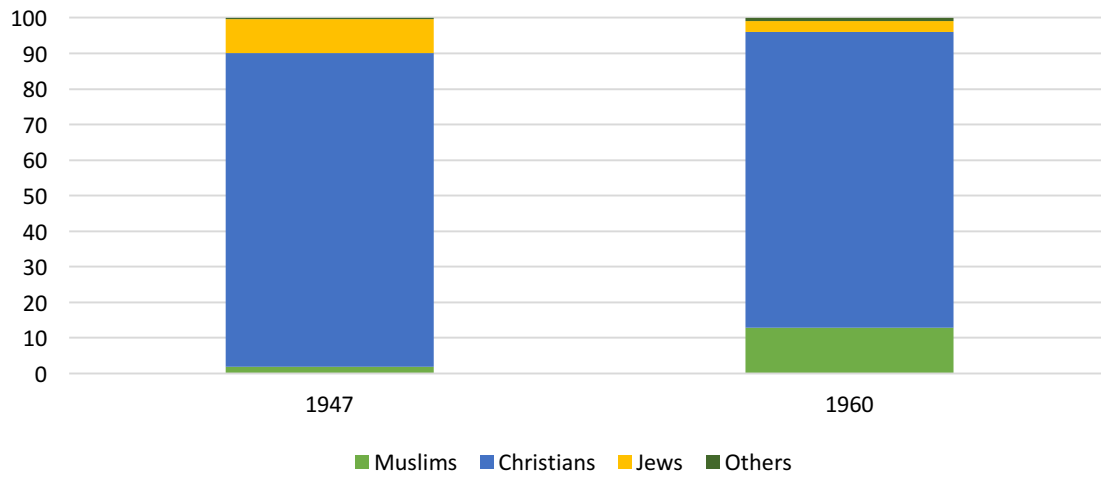
**Table 4b**

**Population by Nationality and Religious Affiliation, Alexandria 1960**

Nationality					Total
	Muslims	Christians	Jewish	Other Beliefs	
<b>Egyptians</b>	<b>1,353,689</b>	<b>116,376</b>	<b>1353</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>1,471,527</b>
Syrians	903	307	1	0	1,211
Palestinians	412	210	0	2	624
Sudanese	2,586	62	7	0	2,655
Other Arabs	1,315	1,036	44	3	2,398
Greeks	104	24,081	270	154	24,609
Italians	40	5,853	426	79	6,398
Other Nationalities	318	5,270	588	152	6,328
<b>Total Non-Egyptians</b>	<b>5,678</b> 12.8%	<b>36,819</b> 83.3%	<b>1,336</b> 3.0%	<b>390</b> 0.9%	<b>44,223</b> 100.0%
<b>Unknown</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>484</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,359,468</b>	<b>153,474</b>	<b>2760</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>1,516,234</b>



**Figure x**  
**Percentage Distribution of Non-Egyptians by Religious Affiliation, Alexandria 1947-1960**



#### **4. Economic Activity**

The distribution of non-Egyptians by economic activity in 1947 and 1960 is given in Table 5 below. Despite the fact that the definitions of economic activities and their subsequent categories may differ between the two censuses, one can roughly notice that non-Egyptians in Alexandria were concentrated in three economic sectors in the two censuses. The three sectors, sorted by their size, were Services, Commerce, and Manufacturing. The percentage share of the Services sector comprised 63.7 percent in 1947, decreased to 36.8 percent in 1960. At the same time, the percentage share of Commerce sector increased from 18.7 to 29.0. The percentage share of Manufacturing sector also increased from 12.9 to 25.5 which indicates a shift from Services sector to Commerce and Manufacturing.

Digging down to the details of the economic activities of non-Egyptians in the 1947 Census, one can notice that they were concentrated in specific economic activities. For example, in the manufacturing sector, non-Egyptians were concentrated in manufacturing of machinery and equipment, textile, food and wood Industries. As for commerce, they were concentrated in the economic activities of trade of plant crops, general trading, banking, finance and insurance. With respect to services, non-Egyptians were working mainly in the economic activities of domestic services, hotels, restaurants and bars and hairdressing and beauty shops. In 1960, non-Egyptians were working mainly in the economic activities of textile, retail sales, banking and personal services.

**Table 5**  
**Economic Activity of non-Egyptians, Alexandria 1947-1960**

Economic Activity	1947		1960	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	185	0.4%	108	0.7%
Mining and quarrying	11	0.0%	13	0.1%
Manufacturing	5,878	12.9%	3815	25.5%
Construction	537	1.2%	251	1.7%
Electricity, gas, and water supply	--	0.0%	133	0.9%
Commerce	8,531	18.7%	4342	29.0%
Transportation and storage	1,440	3.2%	811	5.4%
Services	29,073	63.7%	5508	36.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>45,655</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>14981</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Calculated from 1947 and 1960 Egypt Population Censuses.

## **5. Conclusion**

The data analysis conducted in this paper indicates that non-Egyptians in Alexandria according to the two population censuses of (1947 and 1960) were an integral part of the population of Alexandria. Their contributions to the social and economic mosaic of the, then, metropolitan city was clearly established. No doubt, the existence of non-Egyptians, especially Greeks and Italians, contributed to the metropolitan nature of Alexandria. The fading of non-Egyptians in Alexandria, afterward, witnessed the dwindling of the value of Alexandria as a cosmopolitan city.

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