

# Middle East migration to Brazil: constructing latin levant ethnicity

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On the surface, Brazil is a country of race. It is a place where blacks and whites and people of various shades seem to co-exist in a superficial harmony that is tenuous at best. Thus when I saw a Brazilian telenovela that conflated nationality and ethnicity with its advertisement for "Portuguese, Japanese, Spanish, Italians, Arabs — Don't Miss The Most Brazilian Soap Opera on Television" [Portugueses, Japoneses, Espanhóis, Italianos, Árabes — não percam a novela mais brasileira da televisão], I was somewhat surprised.<sup>1</sup> This was an error on my part since the hype simply reflected how ethnicity was translated into the world of mass culture. Indeed, when you go to São Paulo you may find yourself in the Japanese neighborhood of Liberdade (where the majority of residents today are mestiços from the impoverished Northeast of Brazil), the Jewish bairro of Bom Retiro (where most residents now hail from Korea), or the Arab neighborhood of 25 de Março where the Bolivian population is increasingly present. In southern Brazil you can visit "German", or "Italian" or "Polish" towns. In each case the message is the same: that you have entered alien territory, that "Brazil" is not really like this.

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1. Advertisement for the Bandeirantes Television Network tele-novela "Os Imigrantes" (1981), in *Jornal do Imigrante*, IV:422 (September, 1981), p. 2.

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In many ways, however, the language of nationality used to describe these "alien" spaces masks a world where hyphenated identities are very real even though elite Brazilian culture aggressively rejects the possibility of such a social construction. Indeed, Brazilian society, unlike the US, does not even have linguistic categories that acknowledge hyphenated ethnicity: a third generation Brazilian of Japanese descent is called "Japanese" while a fourth generation Brazilian of Lebanese descent may become a "turco", an "arabe", a "sirio" or a "Sirio/lebanese". While the non-hyphenated formulations are easy to see, once you enter the world of ethnicity things start to change. The hyphen is everywhere, even if it is not always understood. And with the hyphen comes myths about Brazilianness that are all of a type — they reject Brazilian claims of national authenticity in favor of ethnic claims of Brazilianness. And the most diverse groups all seem to have the same myths. Let me give you some examples.

**Myth 1:** This myth is frequently heard among members of Brazil's Jewish community of about 120,000 people or less than 1/10 of one percent of the Brazilian population. The overwhelming majority of this community either immigrated or descends from immigrants who arrived between 1920 and 1940. According to this myth, during the Inquisition, Jews in colonial Portugal chose non-Jewish names based on biblical animals and trees. The claim is that anyone with a name like Coelho or Cardoso, both popular Brazilian names, descends from Jews. *Gerações*, the newsletter of the São Paulo-based Sociedade Genealogica Judaica do Brasil, recently published an article with a genealogical tree suggesting that Fernando Henrique Cardoso, current president of Brazil, is descended from Jews.<sup>2</sup>

**Myth 2:** Between 1908 and 1941 about 190,000 Japanese entered Brazil. Today, more than one million Brazilians claim Japanese

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2. *Gerações* (newsletter of the Sociedade Genealogica Judaica do Brasil), São Paulo, Volume 1, n.º 2, (May, 1995), 13.

descent and some 200,000 of these self-defined *nikkei* currently work in Japan. In the late 1920's Hachiro Fukuhara, owner of the Companhia Nipponica e Plantações do Brasil and one of Japan's most powerful businesspeople, decided to set up a colony. In a series of interviews given to the Japanese and Brazilian press, he claimed that Brazil was "founded by Asiatics" since "the natives who live along the River Amazon look exactly like the Japanese. There is also a close resemblance between them in manners and customs ... (and) a certain Chinese secretary in the German Embassy at Rio (has) made a careful study (of language) and concluded that these Indians descended from Mongols." Fukuhara even claimed he knew of a Buddhist ceremony performed in the Himalayas where a woman holds a tree as she is bearing a child and her husband walks around her, exclaiming happily "I saw the same thing in the Amazon."<sup>3</sup>

**Myth 3:** This is a myth that started circulating around Brazil in the 1870's and was picked up by intellectuals of Arab descent. There are about a quarter of a million Brazilians of Arab descent in Brazil. Beginning in the nineteenth century, a number of well-respected French crackpot theorists suggested that King Solomon sailed the Amazon River and that the Quechua and Portuguese languages were offshoots of ancient Hebrew. Such theories were repeated frequently by the most well-known Arab intellectual of the 1930's, Salomão Jorge, a prize-winning poet, author and radio commentator. Jorge modified the myth to suggest that King Solomon was the "ancestor of the Syrians" and thus Brazil's indigenous tribes descended from Solomon and by extension Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Article by Hachiro Fukuhara, "Brazil founded by asiatics?" in *The Japan Times and Mail*, 26 June 1927. The Kanegafuchi Cotton-Spinning Company was known for its innovative use of dormitories and health services as a means of maintaining female labor. See E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 154. "Nipponese gets 2,500,000 acres as a basis for a vast colony", *Japan Times and Mail*, 11 May 1930.

4. Vicomte Enrique Onffroy de Thoron, *Voyages des flottes de Salomon et d'Hiram en*

**Myth 4:** The "Legend of the town of Marataize" which has been told to me by numerous members of Brazil's Siro-Lebanese community

"There once was a group of peddlers who sold their wares in the interior of Espírito Santos, going from place to place by mule. One of the peddlers was named Aziz and his wife was considered the leader of the women who stayed behind as the men went out to sell their goods. These women went out every day to wash clothes in a place called the "Turkish basin" (bacia das turcas). Over time, the town that grew up around the place where the women washed their clothes came to be called Marataize in honor of the wife (marat) of Aziz."

These four myths all have something in common. In each, an ethnic group claims a more "original" or "authentic" Brazilianness than members of the European descended Brazilian elite itself. The reason is not hard to fathom. Since Brazil has no public hyphenated identities, there is no room for anything but Brazilian or foreigner. This essay thus explores the strategies non-European immigrants and the descendants used to construct their public identities as Brazilians by focusing on the Middle Eastern community. It shows how a country preoccupied with "whitening" itself racially since the early 19th century, actually created a non-white and non-black world as certain immigrant groups challenged

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*Amerique: position géographique de Parvaïm, Ophir & Tarschitsch* (Paris: Imp. G. Towne, 1868). "O Rei Salomão no Rio Amazonas" in Júnior Amarílio, *As vantagens da imigração síria no Brasil: em torno de uma polémica entre os Snrs. Herbert V. Levy e Salomão Jorge, no "Diário de São Paulo"* (Rio de Janeiro: Off. Gr. da S. A. A Nolte, 1925), 87-103. Viriato Correia, "O Rei Salomão no Rio Amazonas", in Salomão Jorge, *Álbun da Colônia Sírio Libanesa no Brasil* (São Paulo: Sociedade Imprensa Brasileira, 1948), 471-479.

5. This story has been told to me in various forms of which I repeat only one. A slightly different version can be found in Claude Fahd Hajjar, *Imigração árabe: 100 anos de reflexão* (São Paulo: Icone Editora, 1985), 145.

6. Maria Stella Ferreira Levy, "O Papel da Migração Internacional na Evolução da População

simplistic notions of race by adding a new element — ethnicity — to the mix. While all of the 4.55 million immigrants who entered Brazil between 1872 and 1949 brought pre-migratory culture with them and created new ethnic identities, it was those immigrants deemed both non-white and non-black who most challenged elite notions of the Brazilian national identity the elites were trying to construct. The numbers of people who fell into the non-black/non-white group are substantial. The most hotly debated groups, Arabs, Asians, and Jews, all entered in greatest number after 1900 and composed about fifteen percent of the total immigrant pool (400,000 of 2,731,360).<sup>6</sup> Cultural difference and skin tone were not the only factors that made these groups particularly visible: their work in commerce and their eventual residential concentrations in Brazil's urban centers challenged elite notions that all immigrants should be agricultural workers.



Middle Eastern immigrants were, in many ways, Brazil's ultimate ethnic group. They were not considered "black", "white", or "yellow" in color and in addition the majority practiced Christianity. Native Brazilians imagined them to be exotic and different even though they were often physically indistinguishable from other "Brazilians". Arab immigrants were difficult for Brazilians to contextualize since they succeeded economically while seemingly remaining uninterested in wholly accepting Euro-Brazilian culture.

The multiplicity of images surely came in part from Portugal. Iberia's conquest by the Moors, the thrill of European reconquest and the excesses of the Inquisition, and the clear Arabic influence on the

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Brasileira (1872 a 1972)". *Revista de Saúde Pública*, supplement, 8 (1974): 49-90.

"Discriminação por Nacionalidade dos Imigrantes Entrando no Brasil no Período 1884-1939", *Revista de Imigração e Colonização*, 1:3, (July 1940), 617-638.

7. Eça de Queiroz, *O Egípto: Notas de Viagem* (1926), Fifth edition (Porto: Lello and Irmão, 1946), 123-140.

Portuguese language, placed Arabs in a special place, as both friend and enemy, as exotically different yet somehow familiar. Portuguese travellers to the Middle East found an audience for their Orientalist musings among Brazil's elite.<sup>7</sup> Images, both textual and visual, of feminized men abounded while suppressed "chaste" women behind veils kept their "lasciviousness. . . hidden behind the mask" and "loose" women in harems sat nakedly waiting for sex.<sup>8</sup> In the twentieth century, influential Brazilians who looked to Portugal for self-understanding, like Gilberto Freyre or Luís da Câmara Cascudo, searched for the traces of a "Moorish presence" in their own Lusified identities.<sup>9</sup>

Members of the Arab-Brazilian community (who often refer to themselves as Siro-Libanese, a term I will use along with Middle Eastern and Syrian/Lebanese) produced an interesting twist on such ideas, insisting that Brazil had assimilated to the older Middle Eastern culture as much as actual Middle Eastern immigrants acculturated to Brazil. Tanus Jorge Bastani's *O Líbano e os Libanêses no Brasil* is typical: Bastani's father emigrated from Lebanon in 1895 and Tanus's dedicatory photograph and comments vaguely speak of Jorge's help in creating "the

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8. José de Souza Larcher, *Viagens no Oriente: O que eu vi e ouvi através do Egipto e da velha Europa* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Schettino, n.d.), Part II, p. 23, 167. The most recent edition of Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* (1851) (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1980) was divided into two volumes: the cover of the first was illustrated with Lecomte du Nouy's *L'Esclave Blanche* (a naked Circassian slave woman) while the cover of the second volume showed a group of veiled women as depicted in Rosset's *Costumes Orientaux*. Ali Behdad, *Belated Travellers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 18-19.

9. Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, 2nd English-Language Edition. Translated by Samuel Putnam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 208-220. This passage is included in Salomão Jorge's *Álbum da Colônia Sírio Libanesa no Brasil* as "A Influência do Mouro na Civilização do Brasil." (São Paulo: Sociedade Impressora Brasileira, 1948), 39-66. Luís da Câmara Cascudo, *Mouros, Franceses e Judeus, três Presenças no Brasil*, (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Letras e Artes, 1967), 17-52.

greatness of the Fatherland of his sons" [cooperou para a grandeza da Pátria dos seus filhos]. In other words both Brazil and Lebanon are equally glorified. Some seventy percent of *O Líbano e os Libanêses* focuses on Lebanese history while the section on Brazil speaks of a "traditional Luso-Lebanese friendship that dates from the Crusades" [A tradicional amizade luso-libanesa datava de dezenas de séculos, desde a era das Cruzadas]. This friendship, according to Bastani, led to a material and psychological shared culture and thus everything from the "bombachas" (leggings) used by gaúchos to churrasco (the famous Brazilian meat grill) became Lebanese in origin.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the frequent ingestion of other foods widely considered "Arab" (like kibe or cubes of meat on a skewer) is seen as showing that Lebanon and Brazil are "very united (and) ... dedicated to sincere and reciprocal friendship."<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, Bastani's final words are to quote a song (that perhaps he made up) "Líbano! Brasil!" whose words characterize Brazil and Lebanon as "brothers". Brothers come from the same biological stock and thus Arabs were Brazilians and vice-versa.

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Between 1884 and 1939 some 107,000 Arabs, mainly Greek (Melkite) and Maronite Catholics or Orthodox, entered Brazil, the overwhelming majority arriving from Syria and Lebanon in the thirty years starting in 1904.<sup>12</sup> In 1914 fourteen different Arabic language

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10. Manoelito de Ornellas, *Gaúchos e beduínos: A origem étnica e a formação social do Rio Grande do Sul* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1948).

11. Tanus Jorge Bastani, *O Líbano e os Libanêses no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: n.p., 1945), 133, 137.

12. "Discriminação por Nacionalidade dos Imigrantes Entrando no Brasil no Período 1884 – 1939", *Revista de Imigração e Colonização*, 1:3, (July 1940), 617-642. "Movimento Imigratório no Brasil de 1819 a 1947" cited in J. Fernando Carneiro, *Imigração e Colonização no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Faculdade Nacional de Filosofia, 1950). *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* [hereafter RIC], 1:4 (October 1940),

newspapers circulated in Brazil and São Paulo's Arabic literary circle, the Al-'Usba al-Andalusiyya (Brazilian New Andalusian League) eventually published an internationally renowned monthly that placed Brazil in the center of *mabjar* literature.

None of this, however, diminished negative perceptions of Arabs among the majority. Denominated as "turcos" in both popular and official language, Arabs also found themselves called "Jews" in Pará (because of a 19th century North African Jewish settlement) and "galegos" (a derogatory term for Spaniards) in Ceará. In 1888 an editorial in the newspaper *Mariannense* (Mariana, Minas Gerais) complained that the solution to the problem of the "throngs" of "Turkish vagabonds" was to "Lock the doors so that they do not infiltrate our organism (bringing) instead of strong blood, the evil virus of an indolent people."<sup>13</sup> An alderman in Rio Preto proposed in 1906 that those who spoke Arabic near a Brazilian be fined on the spot.<sup>14</sup> Guilherme de Almeida, a well-known vanguard poet who wrote a series of satirical articles in 1929

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617-638. Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 15. See also Taufik Duoun, *A Emigração Sírio-Libanesa às Terras de Promissão* (São Paulo: Tipografia Arabé, 1944), 89; Rollie E. Poppino, *Brazil: The Land and People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 194; J. Fernando Carneiro, *Imigração e Colonização no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Faculdade Nacional de Filosofia, 1950), 64; Clark S. Knowlton, "Spatial and Social Mobility of The Syrians and Lebanese in the City of São Paulo, Brazil" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1955), Table 1, 58-59. Published in Portuguese as *Sírios e Libaneses* (São Paulo: Editora Anhembi, 1960).

13. "A emigração turca", *Mariannense* (Mariana, MG). Reprinted in full in *A Imigração - Órgão da Sociedade Central da Imigração*, (Rio de Janeiro), Anno V: 43 (March 1888), 3.

14. A. Tavares de Almeida, *Oeste Paulista: A experiência etnográfica e cultural*, (Rio de Janeiro: Alba Editora, 1943), 171-173. Exchange rates can be found in Linda Lewin, *Politics and Parentela in Paraíba: A Case Study of Family-based Oligarchy in Brazil*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 430; Eugene Ridings, *Business Interest Groups in Nineteenth Century Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xiii.

giving his “impressions of our diverse foreign neighborhoods” in the mass circulation newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, entitled one article “The More than Near East” [O oriente mais que próximo]. Arabs were not people but “moustaches, only moustaches. Contemplative moustaches... hopeful moustaches... smoky moustaches... sonorous moustaches. Moustaches.” A street where many shops were owned by Arab immigrants became a space where “wholesalers sell giant bundles from giant plantations, with giant men with giant mustaches.”<sup>15</sup> Using an image straight from Euro-Brazilian bar culture Almeida wrote, “What’s the recipe for “a Turk”: take the 25 de Março Street cocktail shaker and put in a Syrian, an Arab, an Armenian, a persian, an Egyptian, a Kurd. Shake it up really well and — boom — out comes a Turk.”<sup>16</sup>

Such attitudes forced ethnicity on Syrian and Lebanese immigrants by defining them as outsiders. Thus poetry by immigrants *in Arabic* is considered among the most important in the *mahjar* while the work in Portuguese by those of Arab descent is marked by its Europeanized Orientalism, filled with “Persian carpets” and “hot kisses.”<sup>17</sup> Reflecting the pressure to conform to the norms of dominant society, many Arab immigrants changed their names, claiming that Brazilians were unable to pronounce them. This even took place with names that contained only letters or consonants found in Portuguese. Taufik became Teófilo, Sulaiman became Salomão, Fauzi became Fausto and Mohamad became Manuel. In one case a dentist changed his name

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15. Guilherme de Almeida, “Cosmopolis: O Oriente Mais Proximo”, *O Estado de São Paulo*, 19 May 1929, 6. The entire eight article were published in book form as *Cosmópolis: São Paulo/29* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1962). The best known history of “Orientalism” is Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism*, (New York: Random Houses, 1978).

16. Guilherme de Almeida, “Cosmopolis: O Oriente Mais Proximo”, 6.

17. Salomão Jorge, “Canção do Beduino” in *Arabescos - Poemas 1918 - 1928* (São Paulo: Irmãos Pongetti Editores, 1941), 16. Claude Fahd Hajjar, *Imigração árabe: 100 anos de reflexão* (São Paulo: Icone Editora, 1985), 62-64.

from Abdulmajid Dáu to Hermenegildo Dáu da Luz because "Hermenegildo sounded like Abdulmajid, and Dáu means light (luz)".<sup>18</sup> [Hermenegildo por ser parecido com Abdulmajid, e Dáu (que significa luz)]. Those concerned with enforcing difference on immigrants did not applaud the Brazilianization of Arabic names: Alfredo Ellis Junior, a popular essayist and politician accused Middle Easterners of taking "Brazilian" names to mask their presence.<sup>19</sup>

Arab immigrants also tested ideas about Brazilian national identity by creating a political culture that included their new Siro-Lebanese ethnicity. One example may be seen in the participation of Syrian-Lebanese in the celebrations surrounding the 1922 centennial of independence, an anniversary used by elites to show the world that Brazil had arrived as a "modern" nation. Massive public events took place throughout the twenties as the state reinforced nationalism through the constant construction and dedication of buildings, bridges, roads and monuments.

Leaders of the Syrian-Lebanese community understood that nationalist rhetoric contained the discursive space to promote Arab-Brazilian identity and a "Commission for Syrian-Lebanese Homage on the Centennial of the Independence of Brazil" decided to build a monument to the Syrian-Lebanese community.<sup>20</sup> The sculptor could have

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18. Wadih Safady, *Cenas e cenários dos caminhos de minha vida* (Belo Horizonte: Estabelecimentos Gráficos Santa Maria, 1966), 201. Tanus Jorge Bastani, "A Emigração Libanesa para o Brasil" in Salomão Jorge, *Álbun da Colônia Sírio Libanesa no Brasil* (São Paulo: Sociedade Imprensa Brasileira, 1948), 87.

19. Alfredo Ellis (junior), *Populações Paulistas*, Serie Brasileira 27, (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1934), 203. Ignacio Klich, "Sources on the Lebanese and other Middle Easterners in Latin America", Centre for Lebanese Studies (Oxford), *Papers on Lebanon*, n° 16 (March, 1995), 7.

20. Ugo Fleres, *Ettore Ximenes: Sua Vita e Sue Opere* (Bergamo: Instituto Italiano d'arti Grafiche, 1928), 175-180. São Paulo, Prefeitura Municipal, *Catálogo das obras de arte em logradouros públicos de São Paulo: Regional Sé* (São Paulo: Dept. do Patrimônio Histórico, 1987), 39.

been a nobody and the statues could have been stuck at the end of a little street. But that is not what happened. Instead Ettore Ximenes, a renowned Italian sculptor whose work was associated with Brazilian nationalism, was commissioned to build a monument that would be placed in the Parque Dom Pedro II as part of the centennial celebration. The word "Park" is a bit of a misnomer: this space was the most prestigious government area in Brazil's largest and most powerful city. For everyone involved, a monument by Ximenes in the Parque Dom Pedro II meant you had made it.

The monument, entitled "Amizade Syrio-Libanesa" (Syrian-Lebanese Friendship), was a fifty foot tower of bronze and granite. The base was divided into four sections. Each of three sides contained relieves representing "Syrian" contributions to world culture: the Phoenicians as pioneers of navigation, Haitam I's discovery of the Canary Islands and the teaching of the alphabet. The fourth side was the "symbol of Syrian penetration in Brazil", represented by the "the commerce [that has led to] great prosperity" [comercio este que, alcançou grande prosperidade no Brasil]. The top of the monument was composed of three life-sized figures. At the back stood a female figure representing the Brazilian Republic, "whose glory is the glory of the Brazilian *pátria*". In front of her a "pure Syrian maiden" offers a gift to her "Brazilian brother", an indigenous warrior, "with the same love with which she was welcomed upon arriving in this land blessed by God"<sup>21</sup> [cuja gloria é a gloria da Patria brasileira que nelle tem a expressão mais fiel: aquella numa purissima rapariga syria que oferece mimos ao irmão brasileiro com o mesmo amor que acolheu ao chegar nesta terra abençoada por deus].

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21. Ettore Ximenes, quoted in *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 3 May 1928. P. 9. For a short discussion of a similar monument constructed by the Lebanese community in Tucumán, Argentina, see Michael Humphries, "Ethnic History, Nationalism and Transnationalism in Argentine Arab and Jewish Cultures", *Immigrants and Minorities*, 16: 1 & 2, (March/July 1997), 167-188.

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If the relieves in "Amizade Syrio-Libanesa" are imagined as a story which begins from the base, the message is clear: ancient Syrian greatness changed the world, allowing Brazil to be "discovered" and then prosper. By suggesting that Arabs were part of the colonization of Brazil, and asserting that the three figures at the top of the monument were "brothers", the Syrian-Lebanese community became biologically Brazilian. The symbolism, however, should not be read as assimilationist. At the base of the monument is a poem, in both Arabic and Portuguese, by Elias Farhat, who would later become world famous for his Arabic writings. At the time a young man, Farhat had submitted the poem to a contest that sought to find the best description of the immigrant experience in Brazil. The poem transformed the Middle East into a region of mobile cultural and religious strength, suggesting that Arab ethnicity was not related to place but to person and could co-exist easily within other national cultures. It tried to relate Islam to Christianity through the chivalrous adventures of Richard the Lion-Hearted and Saladin, suggesting that Arabs were at the heart of Christianity and that while Lebanese immigrants were indebted to Brazil for allowing them to settle, the Lebanese presence in Brazil had increased its presence as a "Christian nation."<sup>22</sup>

The public dedication of "Amizade Sírio Libaneza" took place in the Parque Dom Pedro II in 1928. Photographs published in *O Estado de S. Paulo* show that it was a huge event. The ceremony celebrated "the traditional friendship that unites the hardworking Syrian community to the Brazilian people", and included a parade by over two thousand soldiers and speeches by the mayor and city councilmen. Basilio Jafet, president of the commission that raised funds for the statue, was given the honor of opening the ceremony in the name of the President of

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22. Elias Farhat, September, 1922. Translated into Portuguese by Afonso Nagib Sabbag. In Emil Farhat, *Dinheiro na Estrada: Uma saga de imigrantes* (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1986), 3.

Brazil. A military band played the national anthems of Brazil, Syria and Lebanon. In a remarkable display of collective ahistorical memory, the "Syrians and Brazilians" in the crowd "exchanged expressions of the ancient friendship that unites them"<sup>23</sup> [tradicional amizade que une a laboriosa colonia syria ao povo brasileiro].

Nagib Jafet, an industrialist who was vice-president of the monument commission, gave a keynote speech that interpreted "Amizade Sírio Libaneza" in a number of interesting ways. By reminding the audience that the monument had been forged in São Paulo's Lyceu de Artes e Ofícios ("the pride of Brazilian industry") and that the Phoenicians were "the father of the colonizers who came later, the Greek, the Roman, the Portuguese, the Spaniard and the English", Jafet remade Syrian and Lebanese immigrants and their descendants into Brazil's colonizers. This gave the community a "Syrian-Brazilian soul"<sup>24</sup> [alma syrio-brasileira]. An interesting footnote suggests how ideas about hyphenated ethnicity have changed in Brazil. In 1988 the monument was moved from the Parque Dom Pedro II. The new location, which appears to have been chosen and funded by the large Ragueb Chohfi Textile Company, was a park at the entrance to 25 de Março Street, the area associated most strongly with Syrian-Lebanese commerce in São Paulo. In a half century the assertion of Syrian-Lebanese ethnicity saw a spatial shift — from the Brazilian nation (Parque Dom Pedro II) to its own ethnic neighborhood.

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Not all Middle Easterners sought to situate themselves within the Brazilian nation. Indeed, Arab intellectuals in Brazil often encouraged Syrian and Lebanese nationalism. Perhaps most famous of its proponents

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23. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 4 May 1928.

24. "O Discurso do Sr. Nagib Jafet", in Duoun, *A Emigração Sírio-Libanesa*, 153-156.

was Antun Sa'adih, born in Lebanon in 1904. Just before World War I Antun's father, Dr. Khalil Sa'adih, moved to Egypt and from there to Brazil. Sa'adih the son remained in Lebanon during the war, joining his father in 1920. Over the next decade, Antun Sa'adih began to define a theory of Syrian nationalism that included an idea of both an ethnic and spatial Syrian nation.<sup>25</sup> In 1929 Sa'adih returned to Lebanon with the intent of organizing a political party and in 1932 he secretly founded the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, formalizing it publicly two years later. In Brazil, other Arab immigrants took up Sa'adih's challenge, organizing Brazilian sections of a party, and in 1938 Antun Sa'adih returned to Brazil to meet with and raise funds from those who now defined themselves as "Syrian".<sup>26</sup>

Economically success, combined with Arab nationalism and hyphenated European identities to challenge the notion that Brazilian national identity was unitary. This often led nativist intellectuals to try to dismiss Arab immigrant contributions to Brazil by suggesting success in commerce was biological in nature. The nativist leader of the fascistic Ação Integralista Brasileira, Plínio Salgado, suggested that commerce was "the Arab pátria".<sup>27</sup> The essayist Paulo Cursino de Moura suggested that simply "'pronouncing" the name of Rua 25 de Março "mentally" conjured up images of the "turco type", sentiments echoed more recently by Manuel Diégues, Jr. who writes, in what continues to be the standard work on minority communities in Brazil, that "when a "turco" arrives on a street to conduct some commercial activity, the street takes on another color, an ethnic color . . . soon the street is given a Syrian or

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25. Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis* (Cambridge: Center for Middle Eastern Studies/Harvard University Press, 1966), 53-55.

26. Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis*, 59. Philip K. Hitti, *Lebanon in History: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1957), 498.

27. Plínio Salgado, "Síria" in Salomão Jorge, *Album da Colônia Sírio Libanesa no Brasil* (São Paulo: Sociedade Imprensa Brasileira, 1948), 448.

Lebanese physiognomic character.”<sup>28</sup> Such notions appear to have influenced the way the Arab-Brazilian community sees itself. In Rio de Janeiro, for instance, many Siro-Lebanese merchants had their shops in a relatively unmodernized zone of small shops and narrow streets. In time the merchants decided to organize and chose to name their new association “Sociedade de Amigos da Alfândega e Ruas Adjacentes” or SAARA. Of course few if any of these merchants or their immigrant predecessors were actually from the Sahara desert region, but by placing the name of a respected “Arab” locale on the neighborhood they hoped to transform the image of the neighborhood from a negative to positive one.

Large scale pre-World War II Arab immigration to Brazil ended in the 1930’s as part of general decrease in emigration from the Middle East. Following the Suez Crisis after the war, however, large numbers of Sephardic Jews, from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey entered Brazil. There they found a welcome less with the Ashkenazim than with established non-Jewish Middle Eastern groups. More recently, large number of Palestinians, many of Muslim faith, have settled in Brazil. They have generally been viewed in a negative light and leaders of the Syrian-Lebanese community work hard to make distinctions between old and new Middle Easterners.<sup>29</sup>

This essay suggests that the ethnic society of immigrant non-whites and non-blacks operates independently of traditional black/white society and improves the understanding of Brazil by changing the lens through which it is viewed. Yet the creation of Syrian-Lebanese ethnicity

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28. Paulo Cursino de Moura, *São Paulo de outrora: evocações da metropole* [1932] (Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia; Sao Paulo: Editora da Universidade de Sao Paulo, 1980), 174. Manuel Diégues, Jr., *Etnias e Cultura no Brasil* (São Paulo: Círculo do Livro, 1976), 147. The first edition of this book was published in 1952.

29. “Enclave suspeito”, *Veja*, 28:7 (February 15, 1995), 50-52.

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was not simply imposed from above; leading members of the Middle Eastern community asserted that their communities were genetically related to the first Brazilians, the Amozonian tribes, and were thus more Brazilian than most members of the European-descended elite. In the end, the society of sameness and the society of difference fused and the reality of the hyphen continued, far from the public view.