

Arab Women in Latin America

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Arab Women in Latin America

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TRANSFORMING THE WORLD OF WORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ARAB REGION

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The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University

The Lebanese American University founded the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) in 1973. The history of the Institute is closely linked to that of the first women's college in the Middle East, the American Junior College for Women, which was established in 1924 by the Presbyterian Mission. The College, which educated Middle Eastern women for half a century, became co-ed in 1973. In order to honor the college's unique heritage as the first educational institution for women in the region, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was established that same year.

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- Engage in academic research on women in the Arab world.
- Develop and integrate women's studies in the Lebanese American University curriculum.
- Empower women in the Arab world through development programs and education.
- Serve as a catalyst for policy changes regarding the rights of women in the Arab world.
- Facilitate networking and communication among individuals, groups, and institutions concerned with women in the Arab world.
- Extend ties with international organizations and universities working on gender issues.

Al-Raida Quarterly Journal

IWSAW issues a quarterly journal, *al-Raida*, whose mission is to promote research and the dissemination of updated information regarding the condition of women in the Arab world.

Each issue of *al-Raida* features a file which focuses on a particular theme, in addition to articles, conference reports, interviews, book reviews, and art news.

All submitted articles are reviewed by IWSAW. IWSAW reserves the right to accept or reject the articles submitted. Those articles that are accepted will be edited according to journal standards.

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Arab Women in Latin America

George A. Abdelnour

This special volume of *al-Raida* on “Arab Women in Latin America” makes a timely contribution to the scholarship of Levantine migration to what used to be called the New World, and which has inexorably linked the Levant and Latin America for well over a century now. It is well-known that the collapse of the late Ottoman Empire at the turn of the last century and the open immigration policies of Latin American countries were the main drivers behind Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian migration to the region. Much less understood, however, are the experiences of Arab women and the role they played in both cultural preservation and integration into the distinct host societies, in large measure due to a lack of archival documentation and the implicit unreliability, however useful, of oral family histories. It is this largely ignored lacuna that the following pages attempt to address.

Two major themes may be gleaned from the scholarly contributions included in this issue of *al-Raida*. The first is that Lebanese and Arab women’s experience in Latin America, from the Caribbean basin to Latin America’s southern cone, was defined by continuous negotiation between patriarchal values “brought over” from home and those prevailing in the host society, including the appropriateness of women’s labor, even after the emergence of feminism in Latin America. Second, Arab women’s experience was influenced by nationalist self-definitions of the host countries, in turn affecting women’s role in facilitating their family’s integration into the new environment. This is true particularly with regard to the question of race and class in Latin American history.

Authors Stephanie Román and April Mayes join José Najar to note



Mariam Haddad de El Hage with two children en route to Argentina from Lebanon, 1951. Centro Argentino de Investigacion Sobre la Inmigracion Libanesa (CAIIL)

that race functions as a category of considerable cultural anxiety in both the Dominican Republic and Brazil, where large concentrations of African peoples settled from the earliest days of slavery, and has influenced the collective image of Arab women in countries promoting whiteness and modernity. In “A Patriarchal Rite of Passage: Arab Women’s Migration to the Dominican Republic and the Gendered Politics of Immigration History”, Román and Mayes argue that Levantine women were considered sufficiently “white” to fall in line with the prevailing Dominican national ideal, relentlessly pursued by the authoritarian policies of such leaders as Rafael Trujillo, of Europeanizing the island. Thus, Levantine Arab women’s “straight hair” categorized all Arab immigrants as racially desirable in the model nation and facilitated national and economic integration. In “Race, Gender, and Work: Syrian-Lebanese Women in Turn-of-the-Century São Paulo”, Najjar counters previously-made arguments of Syro-Lebanese immigrants as neither white nor black by distinguishing between racial and cultural whiteness (and by extension blackness), a long-standing distinction in Latin American debates about civilization and barbarism that was best articulated in that classic of Latin American letters, Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845), which denigrated indigenous culture in favor of a superior Europe. The implications are clear: by occupying an “in-between” space, Arab immigrants were largely spared the structural barriers to national integration proscribed by race.

José Najjar makes a far more critical point in his study, however, one that is doubly relevant for an understanding of Syro-Lebanese women in Brazil. In looking at the figure of the Arab peddler (in Portuguese, *mascate*), a foundational myth in immigrants’ self-image as economic pioneers, he argues that the peddler bears a close resemblance to the Brazilian notion of the *bandeirante*, the colonial-era scout figure who set out to explore and settle the national territory of what later became Brazil. He critiques this masculine ideal of Arab migration historiography by declaring that Levantine women immigrants also served as peddlers at the turn of the century and that they became self-made merchants in their own right, as the case of Lebanese women Josefina Bardawil and Lamia Diab make clear.

From the articles that follow it is clear that scholarship on Arab women in Latin America suffers from the double-edged sword of sparse archival documentation and a marginal, if not an altogether neglected, role in oral family histories, adding significance to Miriam Ayres’ moving family chronicle of multiple generations of Lebanese Brazilian women in “Fading Photographs: Recollections of the Chouf in Caparaó”. In tracing the important, indeed key role, of women in the preservation of family lore and remembrance, she points out that their story is almost literally left out of the frame, like those missing women in the photographs she describes.

If Arab women’s experience is marked by cultural and racial negotiation in the Dominican Republic and Brazil, the case of Levantine women in Chile, most of who hail from historic Palestine, adds further detail to a migratory map of women whose social and political activism in the Americas has been pronounced while running parallel to events in the eastern Mediterranean.

In “Immigrant Arab Women in Chile during the Renaissance (*Nahda*) 1910s-1920s”, Sarah Limorté examines the Chilean Arabic press contemporaneous with late Ottoman

reformism and to find a deep concern with Arab women's education in Chile, a standard trope of *nahda* modernist thought. Limorté argues that women's education assumed political meaning linked to the perceived superiority of European women and the need to present an acceptable picture of Arab women to the Chilean upper bourgeoisie, which Levantine families longed to join. Contradictorily, the article also highlights the cultural anxiety, evident among opinion writers in the Arab press, stirred up by Arab women's loss of virtue as they gained access to a modern education.

By reading Cecilia Baeza's "Women in the Arab-Palestinian Associations in Chile" alongside Limorté's article a narrative of Arab women's gradual engagement in public life emerges. Her study traces the emergence of women-only charitable organizations in the 1920s, which mirror the establishment of similar associations in the Levant during the rise of Middle Eastern nation states. These charitable associations were an important outlet for women's civic engagement in the host society and a training ground for later political engagement. In the 1980s, Palestinian-Chilean women begin to challenge mixed-gender community organizations for positions of leadership on behalf of the Palestinian cause, to mixed success. One of the outcomes of this, the article concludes, is the gradual dwindling of women-only organizations in Chile.

Together, the articles in this special volume of *al-Raida* offer a snapshot of similarities and differences of Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian women's experiences in diverse Latin American settings. Similarities, because in confronting male-dominated cultures both at home and abroad Arab immigrant women were subjected to a double patriarchy, even though women contributed economically as peddlers and petit merchants from the outset of their arrival. The differences are a natural consequence of divergent ideologies among Latin American nations, with differing conceptions of race and ethnicity, and thus with different barriers to social and economic integration. As such, this current volume points in new scholarly directions for the field of Arab Women's Studies, one that bridges Latin American and Middle Eastern Studies to be sure, but also Women's and Gender Studies and the multiple disciplines that make the study of migration a primary focus.

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Arab Women in Latin America



Stephanie Román and April Mayes

A Patriarchal Rite of Passage:
Arab Women's Migration to the Dominican
Republic and the Gendered Politics of
Immigration History

Cecilia Baeza

Women in the Arab-Palestinian Associations in
Chile: Long Distance Nationalism and Gender
Mixing

José D. Najjar

Race, Gender, and Work:
Syrian-Lebanese Women in Turn-of-the Century
São Paulo

Walter Muller

The Case of Lebanese Women in Argentina

Sarah Limorté

Immigrant Arab Women in Chile during the
Renaissance (*Nahda*), 1910s-1920s

Miriam Ayres

Fading Photographs:
Recollections of the Chouf in Caparaó

Archival Photos of Women Immigrants

A Patriarchal Rite of Passage:

Arab Women's Migration to the Dominican Republic and the Gendered Politics of Immigration History

Stephanie Román and April Mayes*

Introduction

This article aims to further the understanding of gendered migration practices as well as the complex factors that structure the gendered creation of memory among Arabs in the Dominican Republic. More precisely, we focus on the patriarchal erasure of female migration, racial politics, and the gendered family institution through a critical analysis of oral and archival sources. We will show that the silencing of Arab women as unnamed, though implicitly obedient and subservient wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, is a product of contemporary tensions over how Arabs integrate and incorporate themselves into the racial landscape of Dominican society.

The first section of this article provides an overview of Arab migration to the Dominican Republic in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries with an emphasis on migration as a familial process and strategy. In the second part, we explain the appearance of Arab women in the mid-twentieth century migration archive by situating the archival sources in Trujillo-era politics. In the final section we explain why Arab women disappeared from the historical memory of migration. We will show that their erasure not only addressed the perpetuation of a progress narrative among Arab-descended Dominicans, but that it is also important in the broader, ideological battle over *dominicanidad* and its relationship to citizenship and race.

1. In the Dominican Republic, immigrants from the former Ottoman Empire are referred to as "*árabes*", which we translate here as "Arabs". In other Latin American contexts, they are called *Turcos*, or Turks, a term which identifies them more specifically as coming from the Ottoman (Turkish) realm. In this article, we use the term Arab in general, and then Arab-Dominican or Lebanese in order to better convey the identities and forms of identification expressed by second, third, and fourth generation interviewees.

In the Dominican Republic many descendants of Arab migrants to the country relate a tale similar to the one shared by the Fadul family. According to family lore, the first immigrant to the island of Hispaniola was Benjamín who, in the early twentieth century, arrived in Haiti and then moved to Las Matas de Farfán, located on the Haitian-Dominican border. Family members interviewed for this article recalled Benjamín's trek from the Levant to the Caribbean, one experienced by thousands of "*árabes*" from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century.¹ Like other immigrant tales we heard, this one transformed Benjamín into an extraordinary, lone actor who took a leap of faith by crossing the Atlantic. When asked, though, if Benjamín was married at the time of his migration, family members remained silent. After phoning other relatives, David Fadul confirmed that, indeed, Benjamín had been married when he migrated and, in fact, his wife and four



Aunt Zarife and Mr. Wadi Nakhle traveling, 1920. Courtesy of The Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC).

2. Stephanie Román collected nine oral histories based on interviews conducted in homes, offices, and social spaces across Santo Domingo. All names have been changed in order to protect the privacy of the interviewees and their families.

children accompanied him. It was also revealed that Benjamin's only daughter died before the family finally settled in the Dominican Republic (David Fadul, personal communication, August 3, 2010).

As with other migration stories we collected,² the Fadul saga privileged the male immigrant, a fact that is not surprising given the importance of patrilineal descent in Mediterranean cultures. Women's complete erasure from the stories that families shared about their ancestors, however, presents a significant problem to the researcher

who might assume that oral histories provide a more accurate picture of the migration process than what might be gleaned from documentary evidence. In order to name Benjamin's wife, for example, we could not rely on memory alone. Indeed, we found that familial memories left women invisible as migrants.

If our goal is to identify women and analyze their experiences as migrants to the Dominican Republic – to name Benjamin's wife as it were – we found it necessary to combine Arab-Dominican oral histories, where women are absent, with research in local and national archives where Arab women are present. Based on an analysis of immigration records, newspaper accounts, census information, and oral histories, we argue that while Arab migration to the Dominican Republic was a gendered process that privileged males, female migration reveals that family systems and household dynamics shaped men's and women's movements from the Levant to the Caribbean. Women like Benjamin's wife and daughter were as critical to the migration process as their male counterparts, but women's migration has normally been regarded as secondary to men's. We insist, however, that familial demands and gender expectations also informed men's migration and influenced women's migration. Even though Arab women do not emerge in the oral histories as individuated, heroic actors, they played important roles in shaping the migratory and settlement experiences of their men and children.

We insist, however, that we must do more than name Benjamin's wife. Paying attention to the ways in which gender ideals structured the migration process forced us to admit that documentary sources and oral histories were far from gender-neutral data. The archival remnants also revealed, as Aisha Finch (2011) has argued for nineteenth-century Cuba, the "gendered production of historical memory". Historical memory is gendered because the archive privileges certain kinds of actors and events in ways that render women invisible. Building on Finch's insight, we argue that oral histories are a particularly problematic source for accessing Arab women's migration experiences. They erase women and privilege men. Adding to Finch's important contribution,

we will show that women disappear from the familial memories of migration because of Arab-Dominicans' contemporary investments in a linear narrative of progress and masculine heroism to explain and sustain their relatively privileged status in Dominican society.

...oral histories are a particularly problematic source for accessing Arab women's migration experiences.

The "gendered production of historical memory", moreover, does not end with the oral histories. Arab women gain visibility in archival sources, but as racialized and gendered subjects of the Dominican state. The archival materials we analyzed for the twentieth century were shaped by the racial politics of an authoritarian regime invested in whitening the Dominican population as part of its modernizing efforts. As migrants who were "white on arrival" (Guglielmo, 2004),

Arab-Dominicans conformed to a nationalist identity, elaborated during General Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship (1931-1960), that elevated Europeans, Christianity, and whiteness. While Arabs were not European, their lighter skin and "good hair" facilitated their acceptance as whites. As Ginetta Candelario (2007) argues, "hair is the principle signifier of race [in the Dominican Republic], followed by facial features, skin color, and last, ancestry" (p. 224). Arab women, in particular, embody the Dominican racial ideal; as a result, they are valued as women who contribute to whitening the

Dominican ethno-nation. The silence that pervades Arab-Dominican migration stories, then, emerges from Arab-Dominicans' acceptance of social norms that value whiteness and accord them high status in Dominican society.

To name Benjamín's wife, we examine oral histories, newspapers, family documents, and immigration records to extract women from the shadows. At the same time, to explain Arab women's invisibility in certain sources, we apply gender analysis and consider archives as products of their historical contexts. As a result, we present a

Arab migrants generally emerge in the scholarly literature as young, male, able-bodied, and ambitious.

multi-layered analysis of Arab women's migration in which we shed light on actual people's lives and carefully consider the information we use. We begin this article with a brief overview of Arab migration to the Dominican Republic in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. For this period, we relied on both archival sources and oral histories to reconstruct the earliest records of Arab presence in the country. We then turn our attention to Arab migration in the mid-twentieth century. In addition to oral histories, we examine a rich archival base of immigration records housed at the National Archives in Santo Domingo. The last section of this article focuses exclusively on oral histories and on twenty-first century iterations of female erasure from the intimate archives of Arab-Dominican families.

A Brief History of Arab Migration to the Dominican Republic

It is difficult to find Arab women in the early years of migration from the Levant to the Dominican Republic, which lasted from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the first decades of the twentieth. In addition to locating them by unearthing the records and memories of the few women who participated in the initial immigrant wave to the Dominican Republic, we will also illuminate the larger, gendered system that renders women invisible in the migration process. The first Arab migrants to the Dominican Republic, like their counterparts in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America, were attracted to areas experiencing economic growth. As in Ecuador, the Dominican state encouraged immigration from Europe in order to foster economic modernity, but received Arabs instead (Akmir, et. al, 2009; Almeida, 1996). San Pedro de Macorís, home to most of the Dominican Republic's largest sugar mills, was the early epicenter of Arab migration to the country. By the 1890s, Dominican commentators attacked Arab *buhoneros* (peddlers) who sold their goods in San Pedro's hinterlands and often undercut established prices. As Orlando Inoa found (1992), Arabs dominated local commerce, for which the Dominican press vilified them as "bad immigrants" because, as one newspaper noted in 1909, "the Arab does not devote himself to agricultural work" as the Dominican government would have liked (cited in Inoa, 1999, p. 67). Articles labeled Arab *buhoneros* as 'unscrupulous contrabandists' who '[invaded] the nation and the countryside ... converting our commerce into a desolate and sad cemetery' (cited in Inoa, p. 66). Some Dominicans and foreign sugar estate owners, however, defended Arab peddlers and their business practices as "beneficial" because they sold their wares at low prices that most residents could afford. By 1920, 204 *árabes* lived in San Pedro de Macorís (Inoa, 1999, p. 52). Many of them, like Badui M. Dumit who arrived in Santiago in 1900 from Mount Lebanon, were successful merchants or owned stores on sugar estates, much like their counterparts in Haiti and Honduras (Inoa, 1999, pp. 76-77; Plummer, 1981; Euraque, 1995).

Whether they arrived from Haiti, Cuba, or directly from the Levant, Arab migrants generally emerge in the scholarly literature as young, male, able-bodied, and ambitious. As Hourani and Nadim (1992) wrote, Arab migrants were largely “young men from the Christian villages of the Lebanese mountains, and similar villages in Syria and Palestine” (p. 6). Most of those interviewed for this article shared a linear story that usually began with a founding patriarch’s migration, then described the myriad trials he faced, and ended celebrating his eventual economic success. For example, Sara Basha-Kaussa’s family’s migration history featured men and their upward social mobility (Sara Basha-Kaussa, personal communication, July 28, 2010). Her uncle Juan arrived first and settled in San Pedro de Macorís. Longing to escape the devastation and poverty of World War I-era Lebanon, Basha-Kaussa’s father and another brother followed Juan to San Pedro de Macorís. The men eventually settled in Santo Domingo where they opened a successful store.

This image of the Arab workforce contrasts with what Arab-American scholar Alixa Naff (1985), found among Syrian immigrants in the early twentieth-century United States. In the United States, there is ample oral and documentary evidence of women’s active participation in peddling, but the Dominican record remains exclusively focused on men engaging in these pursuits. Indeed, the Fadul and Basha-Kaussa reflections demonstrate that oral narratives suffered the same biases as the written sources – women were absent in both. In this case, and contrary to what researchers may expect, the oral histories did not highlight Arab women and children as part of the migration process. At the same time, the documentary archive clearly privileged the commercial activities of Arab migrants because the Dominican state hoped Arabs would contribute to the country’s long-term economic development. Following Aisha Finch (2011), then, women’s absence from Dominican documentary sources shows the “gendered production of historical memory” since the archive’s bias towards commerce and economic production rendered Arab women invisible as migrants.

Migration has been historically male dominated precisely because “patriarchal families hinder young women’s migration, while for the men, they facilitate migration”.

To address this gender bias, however, it is not enough to simply count women and mix them back into the normative narratives that structure our understanding of migration. Instead, as Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) argues, we need an approach to migration that views migrants as “active participants”, and not simply as pawns in a transnational, global system motivated by personal gain. In order to employ such an approach, the family must be considered as a gendered institution whose members influence the migration process. The family, Hondagneu-Sotelo notes, has the power to shape the prospects, routes, and length of migration for men and women migrants alike, facilitating the movement for some while limiting movement for others. Migration has been historically male-dominated precisely because “patriarchal families hinder young women’s migration, while for the men, they facilitate migration” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1984, p. 83). For some men, then, migration becomes a “patriarchal rite of passage” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1984, p. 83).

By applying this insight to our analysis, the actions of men become less individuated and, instead, situated within gendered expectations that informed their migration

experiences. Indeed, considering the first wave of Arab migration to areas like San Pedro de Macoris in light of Hondagneu-Sotelo's arguments, it becomes quite apparent that men were also burdened by family duties. For example, Benjamín Fadul, who was well into his sixties when he arrived in the Dominican Republic with his family, seems to have been less motivated by individual gain than by dreams of expanded opportunities for his children. Similarly, the Basha-Kaussa's migration underscores how kinship and household strategies influenced male migration. By transforming these immigrant men into individuated, heroic actors, oral histories erase the significance of familial networks, household demands, and the patriarchal kinship system in the Arab migration process. At the same time, historical memories of migration reinforce the idea of migration as a male activity and male right. By questioning patriarchal assumptions about the migration process, we make visible the gendered logic that influenced Arab migration to Latin America and shaped memories of that movement as a predominately male activity. We can also explain women's exclusion from narratives of migration.

Finding Arab Women in the Archive

While archival sources and oral history narratives documenting Arab women's migration to the Dominican Republic in the last quarter of the nineteenth century are scarce, even non-existent, a far richer trove of available documents sheds light on Arab women's arrival to and settlement in the Dominican Republic in the mid-twentieth century. Although incomplete, government drafted residency permits, issued between 1941 and 1965, provide ample evidence of female migration to the Dominican Republic from the Levant. When combined with oral histories and published manuscripts, we are able to make more concrete arguments about Arab women's migration to the Dominican Republic and their settlement patterns. Nevertheless, just as we have explained women's absence from some sources, we also need to account for women's archival visibility. What made keeping track of immigrants so important to the Dominican state in the 1940s? We argue that the Dominican state's efforts to modernize the country by encouraging the immigration and settlement of Europeans, Arabs, and Asians shaped the archival evidence. Arab women's visibility is structured by the narrative hegemony of Trujillo's modernizing discourse, grounded in a policy of racial whitening.

The modernization of the Dominican civil bureaucracy, a process begun by the United States military government during its occupation of the country from 1916 until 1924, continued under General Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship (1930-1961), and resulted in the more professional management of state records. Housed in the National Archives in Santo Domingo, these permits were official requests for temporary residency; for desirable, white immigrants, this was the first step in the process of permanent residency and citizenship. Although an incomplete record, extant permits from the 1940s and 1960s include the names, ports, and year of entry for every immigrant, followed by his or her age, race, color, profession, sex, weight, height, nationality, civil status, country of origin, eye color, hair color, place of residence, and a photo. Given space constraints, we limited our analysis of the permits to those issued in 1941, the first year for which we have documentation.³ Out of the 25,882 granted that year, 507 permits were issued to Arab applicants, or two percent of the total. The state identified Arabs as Lebanese, Palestinian, or Syrian. Lebanese nationals represented 73 percent

3. The residency permits have all been digitized and are available on a series of DVDs. They were acquired largely through the assistance of a fellow researcher, Kiran Jayaram, and Quisqueya Lora. Extant permits include those from 1941, 1941-1943, 1945-1946, 1948, and 1963-1965.

(or 361 applicants) of all Arab residency permit applicants, followed by Palestinians 15 percent (or 74 applicants), and Syrians 11 percent (or 57 applicants). This general proportion of Arabs remains just about the same in contemporary Dominican society (Scheker Hane, 1971).

The residency permits also allow us to reflect on the gendered dimension of Arab migration. In 1941, Arab women made up 15 percent of government-issued residency permits issued to Arab immigrants. Out of these, 83 percent of the women listed “*doméstica*” (domestic) or “*hogar*” (home) as their occupation, and 13 percent listed their occupation as, “*comerciante*” (merchant) or “*estudiante*” (student). Meanwhile, Arab men were overwhelmingly represented as “*comerciantes*” (merchants), with over 80 percent of men’s permits indicating trade as their occupation. Interestingly, civil status appears to have been important in differentiating between those women who identified themselves as “*comerciantes*” and those who said they were “*domésticas*”. While only 11 percent of the women under the housewife category were single or widowed, 60 percent of the women listed as “*comerciante*” were either single or widowed, among them two hotel owners (*dueñas de hoteles*). Perhaps out of economic need, the women in the latter category were able to bend the gender norms that regulated their lives. Yet these gender norms were very strict, especially among the first generation of Arab immigrants. As Beatriz Yapur de Basha, the daughter of Lebanese immigrants, recalled: “my mother always told me that in Lebanon there was a very strong division between men and women. Women didn’t sit to eat with the men, the woman was an instrument of work within the home; cooking the food, complying with her husband’s demands – absolute obedience was expected” (Beatriz Yapur de Basha, personal communication, July 28, 2010). This gender ideal, however, was circumstantial. After her husband’s death, Beatriz’s mother opened her own store on Mella Street with the assistance of her brother-in-law. Reflecting on her mother’s tireless work as both a widow and shop owner, Beatriz remembered that “those were years of intense struggle, my mother was a woman with a lot of courage” (Beatriz Yapur de Basha, personal communication, July 28, 2010).

My mother always told me that in Lebanon there was a very strong division between men and women.

Beatriz Yapur de Basha’s recollections suggest that Arab women in the Dominican Republic, like their counterparts in the United States, expanded their wifely duties and transformed them into income-generating activities that contributed to the success of their families and communities. Alixa Naff (1985) argues that “the economic participation of women, irrespective of religion or sect, contributed significantly to the general economic satisfaction of Syrian immigrants and thus to the impetus to settle permanently. Relatively few families succeeded without the help of one or more women” (p. 178). Quite tellingly, just as the absence of men presented a noteworthy difference that affected Arab women’s occupations in 1941, Beatriz Yapur de Basha’s reflections illustrate a similar pattern in the oral histories wherein some women became dynamic and visible actors due to the absence of men.

We argue, too, that Arab women’s (and men’s) visibility in Trujillo-era archives was the product of the Trujillo regime’s financial and ideological investment in a

Arabs assimilated into Dominican society because they met the requirements for Iberian whiteness.

modernization project that involved whitening the Dominican population. A systematic documentation of race and color in residency permits was necessary in order to assess the number of white immigrants who were expected to promote *cultura* and *progreso* (culture and progress) through whitening. Trujillo and his intellectual supporters considered Arab migrants white enough to “slow the spread of Haitian influence” among Dominicans and “counteract the ‘vegetative’ growth of African blacks” (Peguero, 2008, p. 50). As a result, Trujillo embraced immigration projects that ranged from the (near) humanitarian to the ridiculous. In the wake of the Haitian massacre in October of 1937, when Dominican troops slaughtered tens of thousands of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian ancestry, Trujillo opened the country to Jewish refugees and, later, proposed a Japanese colony along the Haitian-Dominican border (Wells, 2009). Residency permits, then, were embedded in Trujillo’s discriminatory immigration policies that favored whites. As a result, the state transformed Arabs from “bad immigrants” into necessary migrants who could whiten the country.

The residency permits give evidence of the fluidity of whiteness during Trujillo’s rule, at least for non-African descended migrants. In 1941 most Arabs were officially classified as “white.” Specifically, 91 percent of Arabs fell under *Blanco* (white) in the “Color” section of the document while only 5 percent were identified as *Indio* (Indian), and 3 percent as *Trigueño* (brown). Despite these few exceptions, the documents clearly demonstrate that the Trujillo state granted most Arabs “whiteness”. Arabs were considered white because they fit the “somatic norm image” of Dominican whiteness. Harry Hoetink defined somatic norm image as “the complex of physical (somatic) characteristics that are accepted by a group as its norm and ideal” (cited in Howard, p. 23). Hoetink argued that the somatic norm image for whiteness is appreciably darker among Mediterranean peoples than Northern Europeans (Candelario, p. 224). Arabs assimilated into Dominican society because they met the requirements for Iberian whiteness. As a result, Arabs achieved high social and economic status within a largely African-descended society.

Trujillo’s modernizing discourse shaped the archival sources during the regime and continues to structure oral history narratives in the present. Arab-Dominican oral histories unquestionably accept a narrative of progress, one that fits well within Trujillo-era, nationalist ideology, but one that effectively erases the unfavorable, early perceptions of Arab migrants and women as historical actors. Women were visible in oral histories when men were absent. This tendency complements the Dominican archive wherein Arab women’s historical significance was tied to their potential role in whitening the Dominican population. Arab women’s visibility/invisibility suggests a gendered logic at play: both the narrative of progress and Trujillo-era nationalism burdened women with particular responsibilities towards Arab and Dominican communities.

Erasing Women: Twenty-first Century Iterations of Dominican-Arab Identities

The Trujillo era ideology of *cultura y progreso*, which tied modernity and progress

to racial whitening, continues to shape how Arab-Dominicans understand their past and situate themselves in the present. When we elicited information about their contemporary lives, it remained difficult to acquire specific details about women's experiences. Arab women are absent from the oral histories because their presence threatens the progress narrative of male-centered Arab success.

Although race is everywhere present in the Dominican Republic and remains central to the daily lives of many Dominicans, it remains embedded within a specific, and restrictive, economy of discourse such as the idea of a "*raza Dominicana*." Women's hair, according to Ginetta Candelario (2007), is the most important signifier of race, status, and membership within the Dominican body politic. Hair, in particular, externalizes the somatic norm image of Dominican whiteness. Therefore, in addition to skin color, Arabs achieve whiteness in the Dominican Republic because of their "good hair," i.e., it closely resembles straight, European hair. Most important, as Candelario argues, because hair plays such an important role in assigning race and social status, the Dominican ethno-racial ideal implicates women differently than men

and is thus structured by a gendered logic. Women, not men, bear the burden of styling their hair in ways that conform to the norm.

We contend that Arab women have easier access to citizenship claims based on their desirable somatic norm image (straight hair and light skin). Dominican-Lebanese women, in particular, have experienced social mobility within elite Dominican society and have successfully parlayed their social acceptance into various signifiers of social prominence – like high-ranking occupations, political visibility, and marriages with light-skinned Dominicans. As Candelario argues, "Dominican whiteness [is] an explicitly achieved (and achievable) status with connotations of social, political, and economic privilege" (p. 5).

Arab women are absent from the oral histories because their presence threatens the progress narrative of male-centered Arab success.

Race, then, braided through the narrative of progress and modernity, becomes an important site through which Arab-Dominicans access and practice citizenship. For instance, one informant, a grandchild of immigrants, noted that he found a job in the capital because, "I was good looking, I was light skinned" (David Fadul, personal communication, August 3, 2010). Another descendent of Lebanese immigrants also admitted accepting the dominant mythology of cultural *mestizaje* while acknowledging anti-Haitianism when she explained the following: "the Dominican Republic is like a melting pot because in reality we are not something pure, we are a mix of so many things that it is difficult to be closed off. The Haitian culture is the only one that it does not want to accept, but besides that it accepts everything" (Gabriela Rodriguez, personal communication, August 4, 2010).

Arab-Dominicans often explain their success in the Dominican Republic in ethno-racial terms articulated through the discourse of having "good culture." For example, Venessa Fadul remarked: "Dominicans look favorably on Arabs because they have done well in many areas; in education and medicine...I would say that it is a race that has worked very hard here, it is very strong, and it has a very good position because of its work and for this reason people respect them" (Venessa Fadul, personal communication, August, 3, 2010).

Whereas the acceptance of racial norms and ideologies has ingratiated Arabs to Dominican society, Arab foremothers present a problem because their experiences run counter to the narrative of progress Arab-Dominicans consciously and unconsciously deploy to justify their privileged position in society. Some Arab women, for instance, refused assimilation to Dominican norms. For her part, Beatriz Yapur de Basha described feeling “a lot of discrimination” because her mother spoke Arabic with her children and fed them “lots of vegetables”, a culinary habit that led Dominican children to accuse her of “[eating] grass.” Indeed, Beatriz’s mother rejected certain Dominican mainstays and traditions, including the national dish, *sancocho*: “My mother died without ever having tried *sancocho*. She didn’t like it” (Beatriz Yapur de Basha, personal communication, July 28, 2010).

By assuming that migration is a result of push/pull factors that shape individual choice and agency, scholars perpetuate a bias that silences and erases women from the archives and from migration itself.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that the Dominican Republic’s Arab population is an “influential ethnic minority who began migrating to the Dominican Republic towards the end of the 19th century, and who have firmly established themselves in the political, economic, and social spheres of national life” (Howard, 2001, p. 23). We contend, however, that the collective memory of migration has been revised to include only the positive aspects of the community’s role in the Dominican Republic without reference to race or gender as mediating factors that shaped migration, social acceptance, and integration. This is evidenced, we insist, in the general erasure of Arab women from the oral histories of migration and in their visibility in official records. Women have always played an integral role in the success and integration of the Arab community even though these activities have often remained at the margins of the oral record in order to sustain and buttress the patriarchal narrative of Arab progress and success. Benjamin’s wife, whose migration was as much defined by gender ideologies and

household strategies as her husband’s, had a name: Sofia.

As we have argued from the beginning, however, it is not enough to name Sofia and make her visible. As Laura Briggs (2002) reminds us, “recovering ‘real women’ or ‘the oppressed’ is not always possible, nor is it always a good thing” (p. 205). We have emphasized, following Briggs, that silence and visibility can serve racist and gendered politics that reproduce profound inequalities. As a result, this article has tried to shed light on a larger system of interlocking, gendered logics that inform dominant narratives about race, history, and citizenship in the Dominican Republic. In other words, explaining why Sofia disappeared from familial memory is probably more important than naming her and locating her as a historical actor.

To be sure, the overwhelming presence of men as immigrants may explain why the historical memory of migration has privileged men as individualistic pioneers. This argument becomes less tenable, however, in the twentieth century when Arab women become highly visible in residency permits. We insisted that migration followed a gender logic in which the patriarchal family influenced men’s and women’s mobility. By assuming that migration is a result of push/pull factors that shape individual choice and agency, scholars perpetuate a bias that silences and erases women from the

archives and from migration itself. As our research shifts into the twenty-first century, we argue that the absence of women from oral history narratives evidenced Arab-Dominicans' investment in a linear narrative of progress and racial superiority in order to explain their contemporary, social dominance. The development and deployment of Dominican-Arab identity is inextricably connected to Arabs' racial intelligibility as white, cultured, and modern. Arab women fit uncomfortably within this narrative of progress.

As a result, then, women's disappearance from the familial and collective narratives of Arab migration to the Dominican Republic helps sustain the larger ideological structure of whiteness and anti-black racism. Ideas about whiteness and anti-black, anti-Haitian discourse and practice perpetuate Dominicans' investment in an identity many believe is non-racial and anti-racist even as it privileges whiteness against blackness. By refusing to name Arab women, *árabes* provide implicit support for the racial, gender, and class hierarchy in Dominican society. Dominant elites perceive and argue that race and ethnicity do not influence the practice of Dominican citizenship nor do they determine who can claim *dominicanidad*. Dominicans are a "melting pot," a *mestizo* society. Erasing Arab women from the migration narrative and silencing their resistance to assimilation allows Dominican-Lebanese to believe that their integration into Dominican society is a result of their collective and individual success rather than the class and racial hierarchies that privilege Arabs as whites. The absence of Arab women from oral histories has nothing to do with the historical record, which, as we have shown here, is filled with women migrants. Instead, the erasure of Arab women from the collective memory of migration has more to do with the present. It is specifically related to the problematic ways that Arab women are doubly situated to be maintainers of both Arab cultural authenticity and Dominican whiteness through marriage and raising children. By addressing the silences regarding Arab women in migration, we reveal the racist-gendered logic of contemporary Dominican nationalism, a more profound legacy of Trujillo.

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Women in Arab-Palestinian Associations in Chile:

Long Distance Nationalism and Gender Mixing

Cecilia Baeza

Introduction

This article examines a nearly century-long women's involvement in the associations of the Palestinian community in Chile (1920-2010). By reconstituting the long course of action followed by women in these institutions we intend to analyze the transformation that gender roles have undergone, especially with respect to women's increasing politicization in support of the Palestinian cause. Did "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson, 1998), so far a male-exclusive domain, allow the women of the diaspora to renegotiate their roles within the community's associations?

After going through the historical background of Arab-Palestinian female immigration to Chile, we show how the involvement of these women has shifted from a commitment manifesting itself in gender-segregated associational work to a militancy claiming leadership positions within gender-mixed associations. We also highlight the successes of this struggle for equality as well as its limitations. In the last section of this paper, we examine the reasons that led many women, particularly those belonging to the young generations, to prefer leaving the associational milieu rather than engage in confrontations with their male counterparts.

This article is based on a Ph.D thesis for which data was collected from community associations as well as from the very dynamic Arab-Palestinian ethnic press in Chile.¹ The content analysis of these documents has proved to be an extraordinary indicator of gender representation within the Arab community. As for the most recent period (1980-2010), many semi-structured interviews were conducted, and were backed by various participant-observation sessions during the associations' meetings.²

Women in Arab-Palestinian immigration to Chile

In Chile, as well as in the rest of Latin America, the most important wave of immigrants of Levantine origin stretches from the 1880s to the early 1930s. According to the "Guide of the Arab Colony in Chile" published in 1941, nearly 77 percent of these migrants were male (Olguin and Peña, 1990, p. 77). In order to be able to understand the course of action followed by the women of this first generation of immigrants, one should go back to the reasons behind this transatlantic migration.

Levantine emigration to the Americas that started in the early 19th century was in the beginning a spontaneous movement. Neither did it have the political connotation

1. This Political Science Ph.D thesis is entitled: "The Palestinians of Latin America and the Palestinian Cause (Chile, Brazil, Honduras, 1920-2010), and was defended in December 2010 at Science Po Paris.

2. 26 interviews were considered, of which about a third were with women. Six of those women were students and were between 18 and 27 years old. The other 3 were professionals (all university graduates) and were between 40 and 55 years old.

of the European migrations destined to colonize large under-populated spaces of the continent, nor was it the result of forced migration as was the particular case of the Palestinian refugees in 1948. The Levantine emigrants who arrived in Chile in the 1880s were small merchants who voluntarily left their home country in order to find new markets.

Strangely enough, the majority of the immigrants came from Palestine: they constituted nearly 50 percent of the Arab immigration to Chile, whereas Syrians constituted nearly 29 percent, and the Lebanese constituted 18 percent (Olguin & Peña, 1990, p. 74). Almost all Palestinians came from the Christian townships of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, and Beit Jala. In the Palestinian hinterland as well as in the rest of the Ottoman Near East, success stories spread quickly after the merchants of the region met European emigrants who were on their way to the “New World” via Genoa and Marseille. In the villages, young men started dreaming about the American El Dorado. According to Adnan Musallam, the first Palestinian to arrive in Chile in 1880 was a merchant from Bethlehem called *Jubra’il D’eiq*, to be followed soon by Yusef Jacir and Yussef Geries Salah. Later on, the three men became partners. All three started as peddlers with a trunk on their backs travelling through the country, selling commodities to households.

This first wave of Arab-Palestinian migration was of an exploratory type and excluded women to a large extent, for whom the mere thought of “adventure” was inconceivable.

This first generation of merchants was almost exclusively composed of very young men. According to the data processed by Patricia Peña and Myriam Olguin, 40.16 percent of the total number of immigrants who arrived in Chile up until 1940 left their home country when they were between 10 and 20 years old, whereas 27.7 percent of them were between the ages of 20 and 30. This first wave of Arab-Palestinian migration was of an exploratory type and excluded women to a large extent, for whom the mere thought of “adventure” was inconceivable. This type of migration increased in the 1910s due to the political situation prevailing in the Ottoman Empire. In 1909

the nationalist Young Turks’ government decided to amend the terms of conscription by making it mandatory for all citizens, regardless of religion. In order to avoid having their sons enlist in the army, families decided to send their sons to join their uncles, fathers, or brothers who had preceded them to the Americas. Thus, the peak of Arab-Palestinian migration to Chile took place between 1905 and 1914 (Olguin & Peña, 1990, p. 75).

In this context, women’s migration became completely dependent on that of men’s. Women travelled either as daughters with their parents (especially their father), or as wives accompanying their husbands. In the case of women emigrating due to marriage, there were three possible scenarios. In the first situation – and the least common one – husband and wife emigrated together. In his autobiography, Raúl Tarud (2002), a businessman, described his parents’ arrival in Chile: “By the end of February 1906, Giries Tarud el-Masri, who was born in Bethlehem on August 21, 1889, left his home country at 17, with his 13 year old wife, Rahme Suadi Dawid. My grandmother used to say: ‘They are almost fledglings’” (p. 13). In the second situation, the wife followed her husband after having given him some time to settle

abroad. In the meantime, she assumed alone all the household responsibilities, and this situation may have lasted for a long period of time. Salah As'ad al-Ta'mari, a Fatah leader in Bethlehem, talks about his "generation" (born in the 1940s) as a generation of children "raised by [their] mothers", while their fathers and uncles were émigrés abroad (Chesnot & Lama, 1998, p. 34). The last situation is when the emigrant came back to the village on a temporary basis to look for a wife.

In any case, marriage played a major role in the migration process, and was the first motive behind women's migration. In fact, marriages of the early generations of immigrants were still largely endogamous.

A first situation would be the traditional marriage, also called the "Arab" marriage, which required that the woman marry her paternal cousin (*ibn 'amm*) (Granqvist, 1931).³ However, one should not exaggerate the binding side of this type of marriage connected with the *hamula* (patrilineal extended family) structure.

Marriage played a major role in the migration process, and was the first motive behind women's emigration.

Hilma Granqvist notes that in the 1920s, in the village of Artas (near Bethlehem), only 13.3 percent of men married their paternal cousin (Granqvist, 1931). In fact, this practice was not only a custom, it also had a socio-economic dimension. According to Nahla Abdo, this binding aspect was more felt "among landlords and rich peasants, rather than among poor peasants and the have-nots" (Abdo, 1994, p. 153). This is explained by the fact that marriages based on parenthood were associated with safeguarding and generating wealth, as well as with the political position of the *hamula*. In addition to class, endogamous marriages might have had another meaning for the expatriates: "traditional" marriage was "a way to preserve their identity" (Hammami, 1993, p. 286), as a response to the acculturation process expatriates were facing in Chile.

Another way of studying endogamy associated with emigration consists of using ethnicity as a unit of analysis rather than *hamula*. Seen from a wider angle, endogamy becomes particularly interesting when it is connected to the evolution of the matrimonial strategies prevailing in Palestine under the mandate. According to Abner Cohen, these strategies were more likely to follow social criteria rather than family related ones (Cohen, 1970, p. 196, 203 cited by Gonzalez, 1992, p. 114). Thus, emigration and social status were interconnected. In Palestine, expatriates were associated with wealth and modernity. In her autobiography, Victoria Kattan relates that her father, who was a "fanatic Catholic," refused to give her hand in marriage to Nicolas Hirmas, an expatriate who was based in Chile, because he belonged to an Orthodox family. However, he ended up accepting the proposal when he found out that the young Nicolas, who was born in Chile, studied at Barros de Arana College where he did his first communion. What was of prime importance to the father was that the migrant belonged to a "good family" and hailed from the same village. Victoria Kattan thus got married in 1924 at the age of 16 and settled in Chile.

This first pattern of women's emigration remained relatively unchanged for decades. In fact, Palestinian emigration to Chile has never completely stopped, although at no other period did it reach the peak attained in the early 20th century. It fluctuated

3. The research project conducted by Finnish anthropologist and folklorist Hilma Granqvist between 1925 and 1927 about marriage in Palestine is still considered to be a key reference in the field.

according to the pace of wars and economic crises in Palestine. New waves of migrants arrived during the years that followed the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, then after the Six Day War of 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip, and more recently after the deterioration of the social situation and the beginning of the second *Intifada* in the early 2000s. Emigration through marriage, whether arranged or not, still constitutes the major mode of emigration for Palestinian expatriate women to Latin America. However, post-1967 female migrants differ from previous generations of women in that the latter had limited influence in their marriage selection whereas for the former group marriage became an opportunity to fulfill their personal and professional ambitions which were inhibited in Palestine. Palestinian women from the Bethlehem area, hailing from the middle or upper classes of society, were educated and some held university degrees. These women found in emigration to Chile a safe – although affectively costly – way to “live better”. Although this factor did count when the time came to make a decision, these marriages cannot be reduced to a simple social calculation. Now more than ever, it is women with some social connections (parents or acquaintances) who are emigrating to Chile. Women’s emigration to Chile and the birth of baby girls to families of Palestinian origin have progressively brought back equilibrium to the sex ratio of the community.

Women’s Ethnic Organizations: Community Cohesion and “Gender Complementarity”

The Emergence of a Women’s Associational Movement

What role did women play in Arab-Palestinian associations? In order to answer this question, a study of the historical evolution of their participation is necessary.

Women who took part in this first associational movement belonged to the bourgeoisie of the Arab community.

While in the 1910s “clubs” and “societies” flourished in homeland societies, associations in Latin America also developed, thanks to the efforts of Levantine immigrants. In Chile, between 1904 and 1941, nearly fifty associations were created having as a main objective the organization of intra-community mutual aid.

The great majority of these institutions were headed by men; however, women were not completely absent from this development. From the mid-1920s, as they were increasing in number, women started organizing themselves in single-sex institutions. Six women’s associations were thus created in Chile between 1924 and 1935:

the Society of the Syrian-Palestinian Ladies, the Welfare Society of Arab Ladies, the Society of the Orthodox Ladies Hamilat Al-Tib, the Society of Syrian Feminine Youth, the Society of the Women of Homs in Valparaiso, and the Society of Lebanese Ladies in Antofagasta. Similar to men’s associations, women’s associations assembled immigrants on a pan-Arab, religious, local (village of origin), and more and more on a nationalist basis (*wataniyya*), which indicated the increasing influence of Near Eastern nationalisms.

Women who took part in this first associational movement belonged to the bourgeoisie of the Arab community. All of the participating immigrants were educated and came from the most well-known families. An example of standing

and educational background was Cleo Haddad, president of the “Society of Syrian Feminine Youth”, who was also very much involved as vice-president in the “Pro-Foundation Arab College Committee” created in 1934 (Ruiz Moreno & Sáiz Muñoz, 2006, p. 363). The presence of a woman in such an important position in a mixed-sex institution was something very rare at the time. In addition to her social and cultural standing, Cleo Haddad benefited from the fact that the committee dealt with education and childhood, matters usually considered of concern to women.

The creation of female, single-sex institutions should not be considered the best available solution to women relegated to inferior positions in essentially male-dominated associations. Single-sex associations have their advantages too. First of all, they are the ideal place for women to socialize, carry conversations with each other, and share their experiences, whether ethnic or gender-related, as Arabs in Chilean society: as mothers, wives, or young daughters. What should a “señorita” (young lady) of Levantine origin living in Chile expect from marriage during the decade of the 1920s? How do they remain faithful to their own Arab origins at a time when the behavior of the indigenous women was often considered too “liberal” by the members of the community? All these questions find in this homosocial space a context for discussion in a more relaxed atmosphere than the family circle.

Women’s involvement in associations can also be considered an act of self-fulfillment. The “Society of Syrian Feminine Youth” offered courses in artistic embroidery (cited in Ruiz Moreno & Sáiz Muñoz, 2006, p. 368). Some institutions even offered the possibility of professional training for women in the textile industry – a domain in which the community’s men had excelled since the mid-1930s. Emilia Yazigi J. offered a course entitled “Fashion, Cut, and Tailoring” at the Women’s Technical School of Santiago (cited in Ruiz Moreno & Sáiz Muñoz, 2006, p. 368). These schools that have been opening throughout Chile since 1887 for the professional training of young women specialized in this industrial sector. However, working women of Arab origin were still considered exceptions in Chile,⁴ especially among the wealthier classes, because unlike women belonging to the small merchant class, wealthy women did not join the family-run shop.

This low rate of women’s activity within the Arab community should be examined in the structural context of both Chilean and Levantine society: in 1930 women represented 20.2 percent of the working population in Chile⁵ whereas women represented only 9.4 percent of the working population⁶ of Palestine in 1931. The first women immigrants to Chile were not allowed to practice street trading, unlike in the United States where Alixa Naff noted the existence of a great deal of women peddlers (Naff, 1985, p. 177).⁷ Borrowing Oswaldo Truzzi’s hypothesis concerning Levantine women immigrants to Brazil (Truzzi, 2001, p. 115), one can say that the strong patriarchal and less pragmatic culture prevailing in Latin America prevented women from negotiating their independence. In the ethnic press such as *La Reforma* and *Mundo Árabe*, some articles regularly described women’s incorporation into the job market as a way of “corrupting the family, destabilizing and destroying the traditional structures,” in addition to making women “masculine” (cited in Ruiz Moreno & Sáiz Muñoz, 2006, p. 348).

4. However, exceptions are to be mentioned, such as Mary Jury, M.D. The ads for her cabinet of “surgery and women’s diseases” appear regularly in the community press (Ruiz Moreno & Sáiz Muñoz, 2006, p. 348). Again, because she practiced in a domain that used to be considered “compatible” with women’s attributes (i.e. caring for people) Mary Jury was able to practice “honorably”.

5. According to the census data (Hutchinson, 2000).

6. According to the census data (Fleischmann, 2003, p. 52).

7. According to Naff, it was these women who introduced new commodities such as linen and lingerie.

As most women of Levantine origin were not part of the work force, they nevertheless found in their associations a way to join the public sphere by performing activities such as voluntary and charity work. Fundraisings organized by distinguished figures of the community such as Salha Hirmas de Chehade, for instance (*Mundo Árabe*, 28-11-1935, p. 4), were exclusively destined to assist the Arab community, particularly the most deprived families or the recently-settled ones. Later on, these associations widened the scope of their activities to reach the entire Chilean society (Ruiz Moreno & Sáiz Muñoz, 2006, pp. 352-354). Thanks to the donations received, the “Society of the Syrian-Palestinian Ladies” was able to distribute food and clothing. It was even able to donate the sum of three thousand US Dollars to those who lost their jobs as a result of the economic crisis of 1930 (*La Reforma*, July 26, 1931, p. 3). This generous donation received an unprecedented echo in the Chilean press: an *El Mercurio* commentary noted that “[t]he Arab community has wished to contribute to alleviating the difficult situation that affects the whole country through various acts of solidarity in order to help the most deprived in these times of hardship, [times] that demand great sacrifices from the entire society [...] It is a nice example of solidarity these women are showing at a moment when solidarity is needed more than ever” (August 19, 1931, p.1).

Arab women associations in Chile did not take part in the expansion of early Palestinian nationalism.

There is some similarity between the women’s organizations in Chile and those of the Near Eastern, urban, educated, middle class women’s associations at the beginning of the 20th century (Fleishmann, 2003, pp. 95-96). Their contemporaneity, the similarity of their members’ sociological profile, even the resemblance among the names of these associations are striking. According to Ellen Fleischmann, the first organization created in Palestine is most probably the Society of the Orthodox Ladies, founded in Jaffa in 1910, to be followed soon by the Association of Arab Women and the Club of the Arab Ladies, both located in Jerusalem and respectively founded in 1919 and 1921 (Fleischmann, 1995). Whether in the host country or in the “homeland,” the essence of these associations was that charity is inherent to both religion and Arab culture, and that this task is particularly associated with women’s roles. But charity is not only a mere cultural duty. In Chile, women’s associations were filling the gap left by the host state in the social field. The poor educational and public health infrastructure were the motives that made Arab immigrants seek assistance from their own community.

However, there is a substantial difference between the evolution of women’s institutions in the country of origin and that of the institutions created in the country of emigration. In Palestine, the women associational movement became highly politicized. Its leaders modified the notion of charity to put it in the service of the “nation” and openly criticized the Zionist movement. Their members organized conferences, participated in street demonstrations, sent memoranda to the authorities, and visited prisoners. In other words, these middle and upper class women constituted an integral part of the Palestinian nationalist movement. By contrast, Arab women associations in Chile did not take part in the expansion of early Palestinian nationalism. However, this nationalism had a great impact on

Arab immigrants' milieus and was reported extensively by the community press. The Great Arab Rebellion in Palestine (1936-1939) gave rise to an unprecedented movement of long distance solidarity. In 1938 a Central Committee pro-Victims of the Arab Revolution in Palestine was created in order to raise funds from all the Arab associations in Chile. Significantly enough, these fundraisings and activities did not include any women charity association, keeping them away from any activity that had a political connotation.

From Charity to Culture: Women Associations as Factor of Cohesion

The apolitical attitude of the Arab women associations vis-à-vis Near Eastern issues persisted until the 1960s. By centralizing the previously created associations, the United Committee of Arab Ladies carried on with its social mission of charity that was praised by the community press as an expression of "noble solidarity" of "Arab women".⁸ In 1960, the Committee was mobilized in order to assist the victims of the terrible Valdivia earthquake that caused more than 2000 casualties.

In general, women stayed away from the ideological debates that were pulling apart the circles of immigrants who were of Arab descent. Neither did they argue about the importance of "anti-imperialism" to the Arab cause, nor did they take a stand concerning which kind of political regime is most suitable for the Middle East. However, this does not mean that their associations were not affected by the nationalisms exported from the homeland. Indeed, in 1958 the United Committee of Arab Ladies was created as a result of the merging of the associations of Levantine women in the name of "Arab unity", a slogan that was clearly influenced by the then fashionable pan-Arabism.⁹ Nevertheless, this identification did not make women more involved in debates or more thoroughly committed to nationalist actions.

The first signs of a more in-depth involvement of women of Levantine origin appeared as early as 1935 in traditionally male-dominated political milieus.¹⁰ In 1965, Juana Dip Muhana and Margarita Paluz Rivas were the first two MPs of Arab descent to be elected to the Chilean Parliament. Their election was all the more noteworthy knowing that, at the time, only 8.2 percent of the MPs were women. Both of them were members of the Christian Democratic Party. Juana Dip's political achievements are quite telling as to the way these women re-invested their gender identity into politics. A non-working mother of two, her political career started at the age of forty after having dedicated herself for a long period of time to basic social organizations (juntas de vecinos, i.e., neighborhood meetings, nurseries, and farmers' organizations aiming to achieve land reform).¹¹ Dip, an MP of Lebanese origin, was one of the rare persons to talk openly about the political situation prevailing in the Middle East. At the beginning of her mandate, she paid a vibrant tribute to Nasser during a parliamentary session in July 1965. Juana Dip praised the role played by Egyptian women as to the implementation of 'Arab socialism': "This young democracy has granted women a privileged space; they are participating at all levels of the hierarchy and collaborating efficiently in various activities, leaving their indisputable seal on them".¹² Later on, in December 1968, she vigorously denounced the Israeli military operation perpetrated against the Beirut International Airport, in retaliation for the operation led by the Popular Front for the Liberation of

8. *Palestina Patria Mártir, Palestine, a Martyr Country* (Santiago), June 1965.

9. See Lumi de Zalaquett and Idette Falaha, *Comité Unido de Damas Árabes: 50 años de vida y pasión 1958-2008*, United Committee of Arab Ladies: 50 years of life and passion 1958-2008, Ed. Copygraph, Santiago de Chile, 2009, p. 168.

10. Since 1935 in municipal elections.

11. She was re-elected in 1973 for a second term that was interrupted only after a few months by the military coup against President Salvador Allende. http://biografias.bcn.cl/wiki/Juana_Dip_Muhana

12. 21st parliamentary session, Wednesday July 21, 1965, p. 2616-2617.



The United Committee of Arab Ladies' meeting with the First Lady of Chile, María Ruiz Tagle de Frei, 1965. Source: *Palestina Patria Mártir* (Santiago), June 1966

Palestine. However, this was far from being a feminist discourse questioning “gender complementarity.” Members of the United Committee of Arab Ladies as well as MPs of Levantine origin shared the same idea according to which women have to assume a specific social role, a “characteristic seal,” as it pleased Juana Dip to point out.

It is in the name of this specificity that Arab women’s associations took hold of the promotion of their original culture. For Julia Hasbun de Tanus, secretary of the United Committee of Arab Ladies, the aim of the organization was to concretize “the sentiment of compassion that any woman feels towards vulnerable persons” as well as to “make the Arab countries, their language, their culture, and their achievement known as proof of the huge affection [these ladies] have for [their] fathers’ homeland”.¹³ At a time when Arab cultural distinguishing features (language, marriage traditions, the Orthodox religion) in Chile were fading away rapidly, women embarked on a revitalization process whose most important feature was to secure the support of anti-imperialist industrialists and intellectuals of Arab origin. Hence women were able to play a mediating role within the community that conferred on them a new status. In this atmosphere of intra-communitarian tensions and divisions, women’s associations perceived themselves as a unifying factor. So in Chile, like elsewhere in other countries of immigration (Gabbaccia, 1972), the role of these women’s organizations was more to reinforce the cohesion of the immigrant community than to promote women’s autonomy.

In 1965, the United Committee of Arab Ladies was able to collect enough funds in order to acquire a pavilion at the University of Chile with the aim of creating a Center for Arabic Studies (CAS). The first university institution of its kind in Latin America, the CAS became an exceptional center for the diffusion of Arab culture.

13. “Colocación de la Primera Piedra del Pabellón des Estudios Árabes” (Laying of the First Stone of the Pavilion of Arabic Studies), *Palestina Patria Mártir* (Santiago), September-October 1965.

As a consequence of this donation Wagiha María Numan de Labán, president of the Committee, was decorated in October 1965 by the Ambassador of the United Arab Republic on behalf of Nasser's government.

Women's Participation in Long Distance Nationalist Organizations: Between Promises and Frustrations

Women's Involvement in the Palestinian Cause

From the 1970s onward, the role of women in community associations started to

change. Some of them started to question the traditional gender segregation of the organizations' work. On September 21, 1970, the FRELIPA (Palestinian Liberation Front), a leftist Chilean organization founded by Mahfud Massis and Fuad Habash, accomplished the first public action in Latin America in support of the Palestinian Liberation Organization: 25 persons – four of whom were women – occupied the Jordanian Embassy in Santiago for eight hours in protest against the crimes perpetrated by the Hashemite government during "Black September".¹⁴ Women's participation in this occupation was the cause behind the irruption of new women activists in the National Palestinian Movement, such as Leïla Khaled,

the first woman to participate in a plane hijacking. The global impact of Leïla Khaled's action radically changed the conception of young Levantine women with regard to traditional gender roles in the Arab world. Consequently, the questioning of gender segregation became more widespread and disrupted traditional customs, even those prevailing in progressive organizations such as the FRELIPA, which had set aside a "women's section".¹⁵

For the young women of the diaspora, demands for the mixing of gender went hand in hand with their political debut. For the younger generations, it was not possible any more to support the Palestinian cause in women's organizations whose actions were labeled "a-political". Nancy Lolas Silva was one of the first women of Palestinian origin to have played a political role in promoting long distance nationalism – refusing to confine herself to educational issues and charity work. In 1978, she opened the Palestinian Information Bureau inside the Palestinian Club with Michel Marzuca, Fuad Dawabe, and Nicola Hadwa (Lolas, 2001, p. 56). The young woman militated in favor of the Palestinian Club becoming more openly committed to the Palestinian cause and getting closer to the PLO.

14. "Toma sede de embajada jordana" (The occupation of the Jordanian Embassy), *El Mercurio* (Santiago), September, 22 1970.

15. Cf "Saludos al departamento femenino del Frente de Liberación de Palestina con motivo de elección", (Greetings to the women's section of the Palestinian Liberation Front, on the occasion of its election), *Palestina Patria Mártir* (Santiago), September 1964.

In July 1984, the first conference on Palestinian Entities in Latin America and the Caribbean (COPLAC) convened in São Paulo in Brazil (Lolas, 2001, pp. 232-233). The event was jointly organized by the Federation of Arab-Palestinian Entities of Brazil and the Palestinian Club of Chile. It is Nancy Lolas' will of iron that convinced Carlos Abumohor Touma, then president of the Palestinian Club, to accept this task: "This was the first time Nancy Lolas and Carlos Abumohor clashed. Earlier, he used to argue that this was a club of social and sports activities and that its taking part in this conference was a highly political act. Although Nancy Lolas admitted that this was true, she nevertheless considered that it was absolutely essential to do something for the Palestinian cause" (Abumohor, 2005, p. 129). Not only did Nancy



Nancy Lolos between Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) and father Ibrahim Ayad / Amman, Jordan, 1985, Source : Lolos, 2001, p. 85.

Lolas achieve her objectives; she also managed to obtain recognition from the PLO. She was one of the eleven Latin American representatives to have been appointed by the PLO at the National Palestinian Council (NPC). Five of these representatives came from Chile alone, and two of them were women (Nancy Lolos and Rita Hazboun). Nancy Lolos was the only one who was not born in Palestine. This status within the PLO conferred on her a new legitimacy. In 1987, she was elected president of both the Palestinian Federation in Chile (a new entity deriving from the São Paulo Conference) and the Palestinian Club. She replaced Carlos Abumohor Touma, who reigned over the club for twenty five years. This was no slight achievement because she had to convince the members to let a woman run as a candidate, which at the time caused a real “scandal” (Abumohor, 2005, p. 131).

But Nancy Lolos was not the only person to effect change within the institutions of the community. Other young women from Santiago, Viña del Mar, and from other regions managed to improve their status as well. Nancy Lolos’ achievement remains, however, an exceptional one, as she was elected to the head of the most important Palestinian organization in Chile. Nevertheless, her consecration had a lot to do with Yasser Arafat’s personal co-optation as well as that of the PLO leadership since 1984. However, gender desegregation does not necessarily mean equality, and the majority of the Palestinian institutions remained male-dominated. In addition to the gender-

bias already prevalent in Chilean society, there is also the widespread belief in patriarchy in Arab culture that all top positions should be held by men, and a good number of women of Arab origin continue to be involved in women's associations. Although somehow in decline since the 1980s, these associations remain active in charity work (donations to schools, nurseries, hospitals, the Red Cross, etc.), promoting "Arab culture," and perpetuating traditional bourgeois customs such as organizing "tea fashion shows" or "tea-bingo" parties.¹⁶

Between Women's Leadership and Exit Strategies

The revival of Arab-Palestinian organizations in Chile since the early 2000s that came as a result of the second Intifada has allowed a new generation of women to emerge in the community associations, and particularly in student associations focused on the Palestinian cause. In a few years, about ten organizations were either created or reactivated. In Santiago we saw the emergence of the Association of Youths for Palestine (AYFP), and the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), whereas in the small towns of the provinces such as Concepción, Viña del Mar, Iquique, Valdivia, Chillán, or Temuco, "Arab Youths" or "Palestinian Youths" organizations were created.

The members of these associations are usually between 16 and 25 years of age, and girls are very much in the foreground. Many of them have held leadership positions for long periods of times: Elisa Abedrapo at the GUPS-Santiago (2002–2004) and Camila Mattar Hazbun (2009–present) at the Arab Youth for Palestine in Valdivia were two activists elected thanks to their charisma, family background (their parents were active within the community associations), and achievements within other political organizations such as student unions or youth sections within party organizations. They were the ones interviewed by the press, hence becoming the emblematic figures of their organizations.

Taking up the leadership of these highly politicized organizations was no ordinary task for these young women, the majority of whom claimed to be feminists. A frequently mentioned term by these women – as well as by some men – is *caudillismo* (i.e., the ideology of rule by the strong man), used in order to describe the historical form of leadership prevailing in these institutions. The term is borrowed from Latin-American historiography and evokes for its users the idea of personal power and that of an "authoritarian" government.

As a response to the transformations experienced by Arab Chilean men with regards to their masculinity, some young women of Arab-Palestinian origin became more committed to their political engagement within the associations – sometimes being more extremist and uncompromising, politically speaking, than their male counterparts. These attitudes show a quest for legitimacy and identity manifesting itself in the desire to embody the sublimated figure of "authentic" Palestinian militancy. This quest for identity is all stronger because women have to assume the biggest share of responsibility in passing on cultural traditions. Not only are they expected to accomplish duties that are traditionally perceived as being "theirs" in

Taking up the leadership of these highly politicized organizations was no ordinary task for these young women, the majority of whom claimed to be feminists.

16. "Tea-bingo of the Society of Arab Women", *El Mercurio de Valparaíso* (Valparaíso), 19 May 2009, "Fashion show of the Committee of Arab Women", *El Mercurio* (Santiago), 4 September 2004.



Elisa Abedrapo,
interview in
Montevideo,
Uruguay, 2006.
Source : [http://www.
radio36.com.uy](http://www.radio36.com.uy)

the domestic sphere (such as cooking and educating children), but also to choose carefully a future spouse on whom the transmission of the family name will depend. Thus, the patronymic is a determining factor for the Arab-Palestinian diaspora's identification in Chile; whereas for other groups religion and phenotype constitute differentiating criteria, this is not the case for Arab-Palestinians.

This quest for identity is quite clear in the choice that these women have made when they decided to go alone to visit the Palestinian Occupied Territories. This step is noteworthy as it is rare and comes out of individual choice. Unlike many Palestinian families in Brazil – who are more recently settled and who regularly send their children to Palestine or to Jordan to get acquainted with features of Arab culture such as language and marital customs – families of Palestinian descent in Chile do not organize trips for their children to visit their home country (Jardim, 2007 and 2009). The travel projects of these young women reflect a personal decision, even an act of protest vis-à-vis their parents, and are an event in need of much preparation such as taking on “small jobs” to self-finance the long trip. For these young women, the trips constitute their first contact with the Near East as well as a major step with respect to their Palestinian identity, as Nadia Hassan's testimony reveals:

We are very proud to be the children and grand-children of Palestinians in Chile. We proudly reveal our origins whenever it is possible. However, and without being aware of it, we are much farther of what many of us consider as

their homeland, Palestine [...] I spent these last months in Palestine. I was able to recognize in the faces of the people I met, those who warmly welcomed this Chilean woman, my origins; I recognized my own face [...]. Palestine is a land of stories and not a mythical land where olive trees blossom [...].¹⁷

For someone of Arab-Palestinian origin, there is a great deal of discovery that starts upon arrival to Palestine during these trips: an immersion in the language and the discovery of the landscape and that of the people of course, but also and particularly the brutality of the occupation forces. Three of these young women were deported – this is the term that was stamped on their passport – by the Israeli authorities after denying them entry into the Occupied Territories: Elisa Abedrapo in December 2003; Nadia Hasan twice, in September 2005 and in May 2007; and Nadia Silhi in December 2009.¹⁸ The experience is both humiliating and makes the person feel guilty. Nadia Silhi said that the Israeli soldiers treated her as a child and made her feel as a punished “little girl” Nadia Hasan said that she cried as a “little girl” during her questioning. For these leftist young women, the experience recalls the bad memories of the violation of human rights under the military dictatorship (1973-1990). Upon their return, all of them publicly denounced the way they were treated.¹⁹

17. Nadia Hasan, “Palestinos fuera de Palestina, algo más que un sentimiento,” [“Palestinians far from Palestine, something more than just a feeling”], <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=24560>

18. See in particular, Concerning the case of Elisa Abedrapo Iglesias *El Mercurio* (Santiago), 20 December 2003; *La Cuarta* (Santiago), 30 December 2003; and *El Morrocotudo* (Arica), 28 March 2007. Concerning the case of Nadia Hasan Abdo see *La Estrella Palestina* (Buenos Aires), 7 May 2007. Concerning the case of Nadia Silhi Chahin, see Comisión Nacional de Comunicaciones / Federación Palestina de Chile, 15 December 2009, http://www.oicpalestina.org/ver_noticias.php?id=5613

19. For more information see *El Mercurio* (Santiago), 7 January 2004; and *Radio cooperativa* (Santiago), 13 April 2007.

20. See for instance: <http://memoriasdeunajovenformal.blogspot.com/>

Despite their will and determination, the young activists are often disillusioned as to their experience with the Palestinian associations in Chile: they are judged based upon their physical aspect, overwhelmed by the egos and ambitions of their comrades, and overexploited when it comes to executing tasks in the associations. Indeed many are the grievances of these young women vis-à-vis the prevailing structures of the community. When it comes to facing all these difficulties, many of them prefer to retreat, using what Albert Hirschman calls “defection” rather than “speech” (Hirschman, 1995). Many of the interviewed activists abandoned the Palestinian associations due to their disillusion with the working conditions and a lack of receptivity toward their political stances. Significantly enough, there is no single example of a woman having made use of the community associations’ milieu as a “stepping stone” to achieve a political career, whereas since the 1950s scores of political men of Arab-Palestinian origin have earned their spurs in the community institutions.

However, leaving the community associations does not mean being deprived of the right to a voice in the political domain. Many of the young women who left the associations or chose to remain far from them carry on with their activism through writing. In fact, journalism and blogging constitute for these activists a more personal way of contributing to the public debate.²⁰

This tension between the cultural or political nature of women’s organizations is still strong among the Palestinian-Chilean community. May al-Kaila, appointed in 2005 Head of the Delegation of Palestine in Chile, is particularly aware of this problem. A gynecologist and former Secretary General of the office of Women’s Movement in Fatah (1999-2005), May el-Kaila was the first woman appointed as a Palestinian ambassador in Latin America. The role of women within the Palestinian national movement is particularly important for her and she nourishes the project

to settle the Chilean chapter of the General Union of Palestinian Women (UGFP), a historical organization of the PLO. While working closely with Nelly Marzouka, a clinical psychologist from the Palestinian-Chilean community, to establish the new organization during the year 2012, May al-Kaila has encountered some reluctance regarding the establishment of a UGFP-Chile. Many women from the diaspora still refuse any kind of politicization of their organizations and want to limit them to charity.

Conclusion

Women of the Arab-Palestinian diaspora in Chile have been heavily involved in the life of community associations since the 1920s. Until the early 1980s their contribution consisted exclusively of a commitment within women's institutions directed toward the promotion of Arab culture and the community's reputation through charity works addressing Chilean society in its entirety. Their contribution was significant and has had an overall positive impact. Unlike their counterparts in Palestine, these associations were not politically engaged, and were barely involved in supporting Palestinian nationalism.

**Palestine is a land
of stories and not a
mythical land where
olive trees blossom.**

In the 1980s, a new generation of women seriously challenged this type of middle-class female engagement that consisted of filling the empty positions left by men. By mobilizing themselves for the Palestinian cause, these new activists challenged traditional gender segregation in the associations' work and claimed their place within the gender-mixed community institutions. Some of them even managed to reach leadership positions, something that used to be unthinkable earlier, and their successors today occupy top positions in students' associations. However, Palestinian organizations remain in their majority dominated by the men of the community, and this is all the more true given that women usually choose defection whenever an internal crisis arises. Although it has made some change as far as gender roles and representations are concerned, the choice of mixed gender has led to a relative decline in women's associations in the country, thus depriving young women of Arab descent of a space of their own that is still waiting to be recreated.

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Race, Gender, and Work: Syrian-Lebanese Women in Turn-of-the Century Sao Paulo

José D. Najjar

Introduction

Recently the study of the Syrian-Lebanese communities in Latin America has attracted much attention from scholars across a variety of disciplines (Klich & Lesser, 1998; Zobel, 2006; Akmir, 2009). Although the impact of this emerging body of scholarship has greatly contributed to our understanding of non-European immigrants to Latin America and their contribution to their adoptive countries, less attention has been paid to the roles and experiences of Syrian-Lebanese women or women of Syrian-Lebanese descent. Even less attention has been paid to their transnational experiences. Syrian-Lebanese women are often referenced only in passing and are typically depicted as homebound, or as women of leisure engaged in charitable work. Many of these trivial and anecdotal glimpses into the lives of Syrian-Lebanese women in Brazil reflect and reinforce the constant reproduction of gender and color hierarchies in Brazilian nationalist ideology. There has been even less focus on questions pertaining to the privileged white status the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants enjoyed upon their arrival in Brazil.

The accumulation of wealth by members of the Syrian-Lebanese community has been commonly associated with the prominent iconic figure of the Syrian-Lebanese peddler, as both a historical agent and as part of the larger social imaginary. There is little question that in Brazil by the turn of the 19th century most Syrian-Lebanese immigrants were employed as peddlers or were merchants who employed their countrymen as peddlers. Women's absence from the historical record further supports the idea that women did not engage in peddling as a way to make a living. However, there is evidence to suggest that Syrian-Lebanese women, except at the elite level, were found in occupations traditionally associated with their male counterparts. As a white immigrant group, their white privilege allowed them to participate in the emerging capitalist labor market boom at the turn-of-the century in São Paulo. In 19th century São Paulo, color, ethnicity, and race, in relationship to whiteness, became part of a homogeneous ideology associated with certain social privileges; in turn these privileges often reinforced gender and class social standards.

Syrian-Lebanese Women in the United States and Brazil: Towards a Comparative Dialogue

In "Gendering the Chain Migration Thesis," Sara Gualtieri dissects crucial unquestioned components of what she calls the Syrian Transatlantic Migration

in United States historiography.¹ She notes that, for the most part, the available literature has supported the classic example of chain migration in which young men were the first links and were later joined by wives or fiancées. Challenges to this dominant narrative came from the groundbreaking work of scholars such as Alixa Naff and Afif Tannous (See the pioneering works of Naff, 1985, and Tannous, 1943). The works of Naff and Tannous demonstrated the vital role of Syrian-Lebanese women as important actors in the immigration process and how Syrian-Lebanese women were crucial players in developing a Syrian peddling economic niche. Female peddling was commonly understood to be a practice based on patriarchal consent, supported by the discovery of the economic value of women's labor. An alternative interpretation points to the collapse of patriarchal rule, both in society and within the family, as a reason for the incursion of women into peddling. As a whole, these two diametrically opposed theses point to the gradual incursion of women into public life and to a slow process of self-emancipation.

The historiography on the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil fundamentally centers on the notion of ethnic unity, the male immigration experience, and social mobility in the context of the post-emigration experience. As a result, these studies have over-imposed a gendered and biased narrative in which male experiences have saturated not only the historical record but also the community's historical memory. Second, most available works lack rigorous analysis of the experiences of the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants during the early years of their arrival in Brazil, especially against the backdrop of important processes such as the end of slavery and the rise of Brazil's republican government. Furthermore, the historiography on immigration to Brazil tends to look at the Brazilian government as the main actor in the adoption of racial laws which encourage European immigration in order to meet the 'shortage' of human labor in post-abolition Brazil and in order to 'whiten' the Brazilian population. Yet these views fail to account for the role of the immigrant in the exclusion of the Brazilian Black population from the emerging labor market.

Concurrently, one major theme in Syrian-Lebanese historiography highlights economic success as the facilitating force behind Syrian-Lebanese inclusion in the socio-economic fabric of the Brazilian nation state. The ostensibly closed networks built by the Syrian-Lebanese, based on ethnic unity and entrepreneurship, provide partial answers to the emergence of community organizations and their objectives, but they alone cannot sufficiently explain the constant claims of exceptional social mobility. In many ways, the larger picture sketched by the available studies on the Syrian-Lebanese of Brazil offers, in great depth, crucial insights for understanding social mobility and integration from top to bottom – an elite narrative. At a cross-ethnic and national level, the body of literature supports a trend highlighting the 'rags to riches' discourse that is prevalent in many immigration chronicles. But these studies fail to illustrate, let alone acknowledge, the white privilege held by the Syrian-Lebanese upon their arrival, a privilege which all racial groups in different ways help to perpetuate and use to their advantage (Lipsitz, 1998). Were Syrian-Lebanese women at the turn of the nineteenth century as likely as black women to peddle in São Paulo? Was color a factor in the division of labor among working women, especially after the proclamation of the Old Republic? How do color and gender, as intertwined categories of analysis, aid our understanding of everyday life in São Paulo?

1. For an in depth analysis, see Sarah Gualtieri, 2004.

The Peddler Myth

What we know about Syrian-Lebanese women in the historiography can only be understood in contrast to the representation of Syrian-Lebanese men. Beginning in the 1930s, Syrian-Lebanese community intellectuals linked the community's social and economic mobility to the *mascate* (peddler). The *mascate* stood alone as a signifier of economic prosperity enjoyed by elite members of the Syrian-Lebanese community in Brazil and other states in the western hemisphere. The male peddler embodied social mobility, adventure, and masculinity. In short, it was a nationalist metaphor similar to that of the Brazilian *bandeirante* (colonial scout). Also, the *mascate* symbolized hard work and perseverance. Its symbolism is commonly evoked by the different generations of Syrian-Lebanese businessmen and has served to reinforce both Brazil's racial democracy myth as well as the supposedly humble origins of the community. In contemporary São Paulo, the collective memory of the peddler stands at odds with today's peddlers or street vendors, which are known as *camelôs* (Karam, 2006). In the world of the commercially vibrant 25 de Março Street in São Paulo, the Syrian-Lebanese, now store owners, discriminate against the poor peddlers, usually migrants from the Northeast, because of the economic competition they pose.

Far from a fair representation of the Syrian-Lebanese community, the image of the peddler stands not only for economic success but also suggests a male-dominated version of history wherein Syrian-Lebanese men are highlighted as explorers and precursors of the extensive capitalist networks throughout the unexplored regions of the new host nation. It is an allegory of the well-known historical icon of the *bandeirantes*, who partook in the exploration of Portuguese America. The Syrian-Lebanese intellectual elite appropriated symbolic elements of the *bandeirante*: masculinity, exploratory spirit, and economic ambition – and superimposed those elements onto the *mascate* ideal. The masculinization of this community symbol excluded Syrian-Lebanese women as equal partners in the exploration and exploitation of Brazil and Brazilian resources and, most importantly, elided any female contribution to both the ethnic and the national historical narratives. The fallacy of the peddler icon is nothing but an intellectual shortcut used by community members to obscure the economic benefits based on their color status in Brazil. In reality it was the successful business owners who served as role models for the many Syrian-Lebanese immigrants arriving in the city of São Paulo seeking to amass fortunes. The production and gendering of the peddler in the collective memory of the Syrian-Lebanese community functioned as a space that actualized and reorganized the imaginary, using language as the key to meaning and identity, not just as an instrument of expression.

Mirroring social conditions, representations of Syrian-Lebanese women stood diametrically opposed to their relationship to men. Based upon the republican womanhood model, Syrian-Lebanese women appeared to operate within the confines of the home. They were portrayed as patiently caring for the household and the children. Outside the home, they were expected to either go to church or to perform chores that could not be done inside the house. As devoted wives, they occupied a subservient position as they patiently waited for the return of their courageous men.

The symbolic marriage between the *mascate* and the Republican woman icons contributed to the insertion of the Syrian-Lebanese community into the national

historical narrative by drawing parallels between the *bandeirante* and traditional forms of Republican womanhood. This fictional self-proclamation by the Syrian-Lebanese elite forced the adaptation of a community's discourse that was very much in sync with the state's official one. On a different level, the development of the *mascate* as a foundational figure of the Syrian-Lebanese man, along with the representation of Syrian-Lebanese women as Republican women, reaffirmed the Brazilian elite's system of social values. The outcome of these processes not only contributed to the perpetuation of gender hierarchies but to the adoption of color hierarchies.

Peddling and White Privilege

Generally, studies which dealt with issues of race, ethnicity, and national identity and which focused on the Syrian-Lebanese of Brazil have highlighted the notion of neither white nor black to locate Syrian-Lebanese racial identity within the larger Brazilian racial gamut (Lesser, 1999). This argument situates the Syrian-Lebanese as an ambiguous group whose racial characteristics fit neither the Eurocentric model of whiteness nor that of blackness. The fallacy of this argument lies in the failure of scholars to take into account two different complementary discourses of whiteness: one racial (phenotypic and genotypic) and the other one cultural. The former is based on biological, Eurocentric assumptions regarding racial supremacy. The latter is informed by the cultural and intellectual currents that divided the globe between civilized and barbarian societies. Jeffret Lesser's analysis of the economic and political debates over the non-African and non-European migrants in Brazil located the Syrian-Lebanese in a state of socio-political ambivalence in which they are "simultaneously insiders...and...outsiders" (Lesser, 1999, p. 42). They were insiders in the religious sense, because most Syrian-Lebanese were Christian, and outsiders because they were not clustered into the "white, black, red, or yellow" races.

A different approach to the study of race, color, and ethnicity of the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil would place these markers at the forefront of our analysis and deal with their relation to power structures based on Brazil's hierarchy of color. In *White on Arrival*, Thomas A. Guglielmo challenges the generally accepted notion that European immigrants to the United States were classified as 'in-between people' who only became fully white over time and after a great deal of struggle.² In the case of Italian immigrants, Guglielmo maintained that Italians never occupied a social position of in-between colored and/or white because their color status was neither challenged nor sustained. Guglielmo's contentions mirror the conventional and common racial and color classification of the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil. For example, since their arrival at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Syrian-Lebanese's color status was unquestioned since they were considered simultaneously to be racially inferior Turks and privileged whites (Truzzi, 2000). This contention becomes more apparent when the experiences of the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil are compared to those of Afro-Brazilians, Indigenous Brazilians, and Asian immigrants. To employ uncritically the concept of race, and to some extent ethnicity, is to uphold racial discourses which in themselves hold together a set of often contrasting theories, practices, and institutions of power, since race as a concept has neither a precise nor an imprecise meaning. Additionally, failure to challenge the neither-black-nor-white, in-between-peoples discourse in the Brazilian context would directly mean the reformulation and validation of the already obsolete notion of Brazilian racial democracy and its racist undertones.

2. European immigrants were generally better accepted and treated than other non-European social groups in U.S. society. (See Thomas A. Guglielmo, 2003).

The experiences of Syrian-Lebanese peddlers, both men and women, in São Paulo need to be understood within the context of the division of labor across racial lines. Peddling in São Paulo, for the most part, was an occupation monopolized by Europeans and Middle Easterners in the late nineteenth century. In *Sírios e Libaneses e Seus Descendentes na Sociedade Paulista*, Oswaldo Truzzi looks at the interconnected socio-economic and political relationships between the Syrian-Lebanese community and other competing economic and political actors in the Paulista economy (See Truzzi, 2000). He argues that by being willing to extend credit to their clients for up to one year at a time, a practice that few other ethnic groups were able or willing to do, the Syrian-Lebanese successfully refashioned and invented popular trade. In turn, the Brazilian society associated the Syrian-Lebanese community's image in a very clear way with commerce and commercial entrepreneurship. The successful and popular economic practices employed by the Syrian-Lebanese peddlers created resentment among their competitors, among them Italians, Germans, and Brazilians of Portuguese ancestry.

Regardless of the tension among peddlers, what is evident here is the fact that non-whites were excluded from the economic benefits of peddling. After the end of slavery and during what should have been a major labor adjustment, the black population and members of the new wave of immigrants should have come together in the revamped post-slavery labor market (Domingues, 2003). However, this was not the case. The predilection for European immigrant labor among the Paulista elite supplanted the black population's labor force in practically all important labor activities. Thus, the waves of immigrants and the systematic destitution of black communities generated a new racialized social environment in which the white immigrants not only monopolized the job market and other important employment positions, but also monopolized many aspects of public space: streets, public schools, housing, etc. In this regard, Syrian-Lebanese women benefited from their white privilege as they ventured into the job market, either as peddlers or as business owners.

Women's Work Against Adversity

In 1988, the publication of *Memórias da Imigração: libaneses e sírios em São Paulo*, an edited volume of oral histories by both men and women, advanced our knowledge of the individual experiences of the earliest pioneers who settled in São Paulo.³ At first glance, the accounts provided by some of the women reiterated the dominant narrative of the community's social mobility in Brazil. For example, one of the participants, Latife Racy, emphasized the experience of her father, the intrepid male, as part of her family history. The focus of Racy's story and of other women in the volume shifted constantly to prioritize the experiences of the community's men. The accumulation of wealth and the spirit of adventure appeared to be gendered in the processes of memory recollection. However, *Memórias da Imigração* occasionally allowed the experiences of women to disrupt the molded structure of the community's official story and facilitated the emergence of what some would call the exception to the rule.

3. The work of Betty Loeb Greiber et al., 1998, provides a variety of oral histories mainly from early immigrants to São Paulo.

A case in point is that of Josefina Bardawil, who was born in Zahle, Lebanon, in February, 1918. After the death of her father, her mother, Anice Bu-Hamra, asked her four brothers to come to Brazil and work in a textile factory that was owned by her

mother's family in the city of Fortaleza, Ceará. At the age of 26, she emigrated to Brazil with her husband Deratan at the request of her brothers. After living with her siblings for a year, Josefina felt that she needed her own space and her own home. Soon the couple moved to São Paulo. Over the years, Josefina resented her marriage to Deratan. As a young woman she had dated a few men but her family allowed her to marry Deratan only, an international correspondent for the *Al Nochel* newspaper. From her house in São Paulo, Josefina sold imported fabrics that her husband sent her from France. It was a lucrative business. Unfortunately for Josefina, she never reaped the economic benefits of her own labor. It was Josefina's husband, Deratan, who kept all the money, to the very last penny. But Josefina's exploitation didn't end there. Every Sunday, Josefina cooked for the many friends her husband invited over for lunch; sometimes there were up to 20 cars parked outside of her house. Deratan used to invite people to come to have lunch prepared every Sunday by Josefina and stay the whole day. Cooking for these guests led to a situation where domestic chores became essential business transactions for solidifying community relationships, especially those between Josefina's husband and other community members.

After many years, Josefina left her husband. She had no children by him, something that made her very happy. However, the separation from her husband failed to provide an equal separation of their communal wealth. As a young bride, Josefina entered her marriage with £180,000 (British pounds) which were used for the construction of their home. Because all legal transactions were made under her husband's name, she walked away from the marriage empty-handed. After her husband's death, Josefina learned that her husband had donated their fortune to charity and other family members. Even after his death, the economic decisions made by Josefina's husband preserved his legacy as a generous gentleman, a savvy businessman, and an adventurous pioneer both among members of his community and outsiders. Yet Josefina's account problematizes and challenges the narrative of male economic mobility that is so profoundly embedded in the historiography. Even if the process of immigration did permit her to move away from the traditional extended Middle Eastern family nexus, any sort of independence gained through her own labor failed because of her position in the gendered Brazilian social hierarchy.

For other women, such as Lamia Diab, the exploitation of her womanhood went beyond the limits of the migratory process.⁴ Lamia Diab's grandfather on her mother's side was the first to emigrate to Brazil at the turn of the century. Her father followed. Upon her father's arrival in São Paulo, he became a merchant with the help of his cousins. He bought and sold beans, rice, even becoming involved in the coffee trade. After some time, he bought a small ranch where he grew different types of fruit. However, he soon sold part of it to dedicate more time to his gas station business.

Lamia spent part of her youth in the city of Kafarakabi where she, like her siblings, attended the local school. The villagers made a living crocheting and knitting; everyone worked for a living. The devastation of World War I interrupted everyday life for the entire village. At the beginning of the war, Lamia and her cousin left Lebanon and sought refuge in Syria. At the age of 16 or 17 she married. In retrospect, she could not make sense of why she married at such a young age. She rationalized her marriage as an event that was born out of a lack of common sense, born out

4. The oral testimony of Lamia Diab is part of a series of oral histories held by the Museo da Imigração Setor de História Oral at the Memorial do imigrante Museum of the State of São Paulo, *Série Depoimentos*, No. 58 (1998).

of the war's torments. During the war, people often got hungry. Luckily for her, the war had not reached the region of Syria that she lived in and the locals continued to attend to their crops. In order to gather some wheat, the only source of foodstuff for Lamia and other refugees, her countrymen exercised their male privilege and coerced Lamia to marry against her will a Lebanese man who worked in the wheat fields.

After the war ended, Lamia and her husband returned to Lebanon. As normality returned to her life, Lamia grew resentful of her husband's gambling problem, which left her family in a precarious financial state. Aware of this situation, her father asked her to come to Brazil with her children and if she so desired, with her husband. Lamia knew very little about Brazil. Most of what she knew about this distant land came from the correspondence between her and her father, or from her neighbors who either had lived in Brazil or knew someone living there. Yet the one thing Lamia knew about Brazil, aside from a bad reputation among villagers, was the fact that Brazil had a large Black population. Prior to her emigration to Brazil, some of the town people asked Lamia if she was taking her blonde and cute little son to the Blacks in Brazil [sic]. It is difficult, if not impossible, to assess this highly racialized statement as it relates to Syria and Lebanese people's knowledge of race and race relations, especially between whites and blacks in Brazil. There is no doubt that the Syrian-Lebanese, both in the Levant and in the Americas, knew of the existence of Black communities across the hemisphere. Yet Lamia's recollections seem more likely to have been informed by her experiences living in Brazil than her experiences back in Lebanon. In other words, in societies where religious affiliations frequently supersede any other individual or group collective identity, anxieties about race and color appear to be farfetched.

Soon, it became obvious to her family and friends that Lamia's husband lacked any interest in improving his family's economic situation. On one occasion, as the couple argued with each other, Lamia sought the help of a soldier who happened to be present at her father's gas station. She quickly showed the soldier a revolver, which, according to Lamia, belonged to her husband. She accused her husband of wanting to kill her father with it. After much paperwork and the intervention of an attorney, Lamia's husband, after spending some time in prison, was deported back to Lebanon.

With her husband's deportation, Lamia became her family's sole provider. She found a factory job in the Tatuapé district of São Paulo. When the factory owner, also Lebanese, asked her if she had any experience, she replied that she had never been inside a factory. The factory owner gave her a job cleaning the fabric pieces that came out of the looms before they were sent off to be painted. Once she secured that job, she rented a small house and brought her children to live with her. After ten years in the factory, Lamia decided to start her own business. She began to look for a practical space where she and her family could live and where she could also start her own business – a common practice among Syrian-Lebanese business owners (Truzzi, 2005). It wasn't long before she struck a deal with an Italian man who rented out to her just the type of building she was looking for. She began selling scraps of material in her store. Advised by her brother-in-law, who had a significant amount of business experience, Lamia began to sell larger pieces of fabric. For Lamia, the relative success of her business and to some extent her own life had nothing to do with her countrymen or her extended family; rather, it had everything to do with the choices

she made along the way. At the early stages of her business, she bought most of her merchandise from the merchants on 25 de Março Street, but as her business grew, she negotiated directly with factories. This was a slow moving process, but she managed to make it all on her own.

Conclusion

For many decades now, Syrian-Lebanese of all generations continue to point to the peddler as a symbol representing their humble origins and successful economic mobility. Over the years, the peddler embodied white male characteristics, analogous to the Brazilian *bandeirante*, and excluded the contributions of Syrian-Lebanese women. While single, married, and widowed individuals arrived in São Paulo under different socio-economic circumstances, their perceived “whiteness” allowed them access to niches of the emerging capitalist market from which non-whites were excluded. Working-class Syrian-Lebanese women worked outside the home as factory workers, peddlers, or as business owners. Their economic contribution to their families and community changed very little as a result of the migration experience. In general terms, Syrian-Lebanese women were as adventurous and pioneering as their male compatriots during the early years of settlement in Brazil.

While some scholars have argued that in Brazil the process of race classification is imprecise due in part to the positive correlation between race and class (Truzzi, 1997), others have considered the Syrian-Lebanese migrants to be neither black nor white. In the early years of migration to Brazil, the Syrian-Lebanese were classified as white by the state in the positivistic sense. Yet race, ethnicity, and color as relationships of power cannot be understood simply in this sense. Access to jobs, business opportunities, and housing, among other aspects of everyday life in the emerging metropolis, were informed by the structured division of labor in São Paulo and based on gender, class, and color hierarchies (Chalhoub, 1986). In this regard, Syrian-Lebanese, both men and women, benefited from their color classification. For women such as Lamia Diab, color, gender, and class functioned as pivoted-axels, constantly repositioning their location woman/white/immigrant/etc., as the women challenged conventional white patriarchal social norms, both in public and in private life. Examining the intersection between gender, race, and class as compatible categories of analysis compels us to rethink the dominant narrative of Syrian-Lebanese emigration to Brazil – from the chain migration thesis, the exceptional social mobility myth, to uncharted territories of color privilege and exclusion.

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The Case of Lebanese Women in Argentina

Walter Muller

Trans-Atlantic travel experienced an extraordinary boost in the middle of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, increasing the number of immigrants who intended to go to South America. From that moment forward they not only hailed from Europe, as had been the case with the majority of immigrants until then, but from the newly-incorporated Mediterranean region, including Lebanon.

The vast majority of Lebanese immigrants were young, unmarried men (Muller, 2006). This was due in large measure to pressure exerted by the Ottoman Empire over them, thus opening the doors of exile.

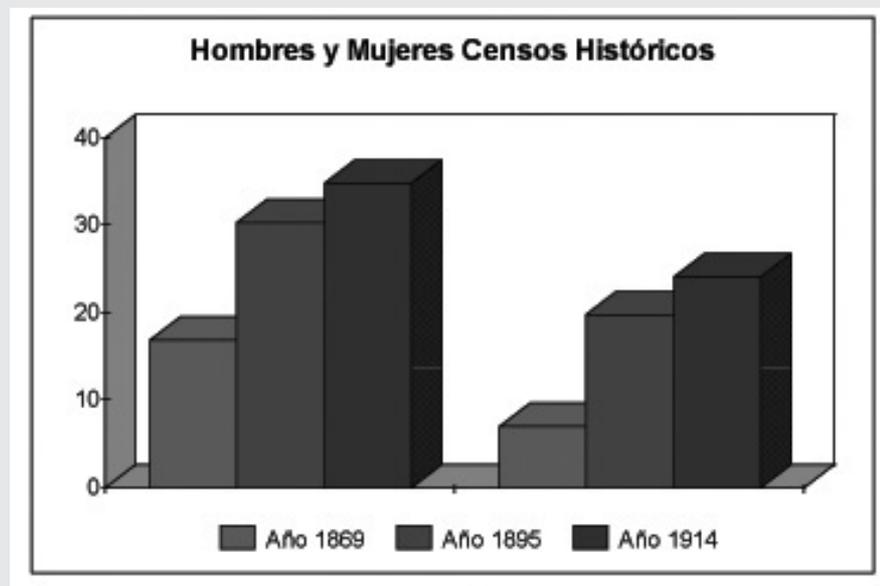
Argentina's various national censuses show the following facts and figures (Lattes, 1972):

However, while the figures show a substantial numerical weight in favor of men, the impact of women's arrival was substantial for the following reasons:

- They came accompanying male relatives fleeing the Ottoman Empire.
- They accompanied their fathers.
- They came in order to marry fellow Lebanese who had taken root in the host society.
- They arrived with their sons and daughters in order to reunite with their previously-arrived husbands.
- They made the trip alone.

The Arrival of Lebanese Women in Latin America

The arrival of Lebanese women to Latin America was of great importance for the formation of



Lebanese Men and Women Immigrants in Argentina by Historical Census 1869, 1895, and 1914 (Lattes, 1972).



Pasaporte Atué Rosa. French Mandate Era passport, 1921. Passport issued by the French Mandate in Lebanon in 1924 [of a Lebanese woman and her son] (CAILL: Centro Argentino de Investigación sobre la Inmigración Libanesa (Archive))

endogamous marriages, within which the origins of cultural identity was preserved and transmitted to descendants in the host society.

The cultural legacy carried by Lebanese immigrants (including language, cuisine, and oral family history) was as a whole transmitted by Lebanese mothers since they were the ones with whom children spent the bulk of their time. Lebanese immigrants who married women of other nationalities experienced more difficulties in passing on the culture of origin.

Women in Argentina and other Latin American countries, as in other parts of the world, had to overcome many obstacles in order to achieve equality, though many women in Argentina have distinguished themselves in the pursuit of women's causes. These women should be honored for openly supporting the achievement of a more just and egalitarian society. Among them stand out Alicia Moreau de Justo, Victoria Ocampo, Eva Duarte de Perón, and the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. Among the latter two groups today, many of them octogenarians, we find individuals demanding to know the fate of children and

grandchildren who "disappeared" during the last military dictatorship in Argentina from 1976 to 1982.

Immigrant women in Argentina were also pioneers in forming debate clubs, committees, and women's associations, and in most cases dedicated themselves to charitable activities. Lebanese women were no exception. Shoulder to shoulder with men, they undertook charity work in different provinces, collected funds to assist the needy, produced clothing, and collaborated with religious and educational organizations.

In the decade of the 1930s women's organizations proliferated throughout the country. Women congregated, debated, and coalesced around goals they labored collectively to achieve.

To cite an example of what took place in that period, we take the case of the Circle of Ladies of the Province of Buenos Aires. As its president wrote, "The Confederation of Charity of Argentina, an association of veritable social significance given its diversity and breadth, is comprised of 14 working groups, each of which was created to cater to the



Lebanese women in the Sociedad Libanesa de Rosario, 1928 (CAIIL Archive)

needs of each province, and a Supreme Council that coordinates activities of the working groups in the service of the nation”.¹

Within Lebanese institutions women formed women’s commissions, performing charitable activities for the community and society in general. Their associational activities gave them access to human and material resources necessary to achieve the goals they had laid out for themselves.

In the context of the times, such activities were truly significant, though not well received given women’s participation in society. However, women’s committees always lent prestige to the association, providing innovative ideas and bringing a touch of quality and fine-tuning to all institutional activities (Baclini, 2003, p.30). Lebanese women’s activities in the different urban institutions to which they belonged were considerable, both in an organized (namely through committee work) or non-organized fashion.

Lebanese women consistently collaborated in social and cultural activities, organizing dinners and lunches attended mostly by women (men participated in their own separate meetings), proof of how

Lebanese women increasingly demanded their own space both within the Lebanese community and society in general. Their activities were a source of emulation to other women seeking their own social space.

It is a fact that women began to conquer new spaces and acquire forms of conduct previously only allowed to men. A publication from that time period illustrates the mindset found in the first decades of the twentieth century: “Who has taught you to doubt or to discuss things pertaining to doctrine, morality, or governance of the Church? You must have learned it from the serpent of paradise. If you want to know so much, why not simply obey? (Palau, 1927).

Texts like these demonstrate the extent to which conservative Argentine society denigrated women’s participation in society. However, with perseverance they managed to meet the challenge: “Women confronted prohibitions and limits. They learned to move freely throughout the cities, far from the supervision or protection of men. They learned to exercise their rights and know their own bodies. They learned the price and responsibility of independence” (Sarlo, 1999).



Meeting of Lebanese women, end of 1940's (CAILL Archive)

Lebanese women counted on the courage born of having left their native Lebanon and of having to forge a shield to protect them from the pain of exile. Undoubtedly their actions contributed to the achievements that women enjoy today in Argentina. They realized how to open paths and unify their efforts to further the cause of their sex: "The Lebanese woman is a perfect mixture between the strong cedar that grows despite adversity and the water of the Mediterranean that molds to the winds that blow at its shores" (Daher, 2010).

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The Lebanese Susana Yoma, a recent arrival to Argentina, at the start of the 20th century. (CAILL Archive)



ENDNOTES

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Immigrant Arab Women in Chile during the Renaissance (*Nahda*), 1910s-1920s

Sarah Limorté

Introduction

Levantine immigration to Chile started during the last quarter of the 19th century. This immigration, almost exclusively male at the outset, changed at the beginning of the 20th century when women started following their fathers, brothers, and husbands to the New World. Defining the role and status of the Arab woman within her community in Chile has never before been tackled in a detailed study. This article attempts to broach the subject by looking at Arabic newspapers published in Chile between 1912 and the end of the 1920s. A thematic analysis of articles dealing with the question of women or written by women, appearing in publications such as *Al-Murshid*, *Asch-Schabibat*, *Al-Watan*, and *Oriente*, will be discussed.¹

This thematic analysis has shed light on questions relating to the role and status of women at the very heart of the immigrant community and their subsequent reformulation. This reformulation was linked, on the one hand, to reformist currents of thought in the society of origin and, on the other, to the phenomenon of immigration itself and the process of social integration and identity strategies in the host society. The first part of the article will focus on the question of women in the context of the *nahda*, a period of “awakening” or “renaissance” in which Arab-Ottoman societies sought to define their place in the modern world, their eyes turned towards the “West”. The second part of the article will highlight the complexity and heterogeneous character of this process by reflecting on the concept of honor (*sharaf*).

Nahda, Women and Modernity

Educated Women: The Pillar of Modern Nations

When the first Arab immigrants settled in Chile, their societies of origin were witnessing important social, political, economic, and cultural transformations. The second half of the 20th century is marked by the emergence within the Ottoman Empire of a reformist drive which seeks to understand and to fix the Orient’s backwardness in comparison with an industrialized, colonial and triumphant Europe. Arab-speaking elites took part in the movement and called for an awakening, a Renaissance for the Arabs, the *nahda*.

1. Newspapers published in Santiago, Chile between 1912 and 1917, 1917 and 1919, 1920 and 1928, and 1927 and 1928.

Nahda theorists were the first people to think of Arab nationalism and pushed for Arab modernity: Arabs should catch up with the West, the symbol of modernity, by adopting its technological and cultural advancement while preserving and reviving what brought on the glory of Arab-Muslim civilization a few centuries earlier. Women's status and role in the elaboration of modern Arab society was at the heart of this issue.

Nahda philosophers agree that women are a key factor in the modernization of society because they are responsible for the education of new generations. Reformist thinkers regard educated women as pillars of a modern nation. A woman's main role as a mother and wife is maintained, but it is given a patriotic and civilizational dimension. An article entitled "Ne méprisez pas la femme, éduquez-la!" (Don't hate women, educate them!), published in Santiago in 1916 sums up this notion in the following manner:

Not one people on this earth have been able to walk the steps of civilization (*darajât al 'umrân*) before having educated its women. For how can a man succeed when she who has fed him the milk of her breast has not been educated and knows nothing of the sciences, of literature or of the right way to offer an education? This comes to prove that women are active members in the making of society [...].

An educated woman feeds her child the milk of knowledge or refinement. She sows in it a seed that will grow all its life and will become a model of refinement and virtue. By contrast, an ignorant woman is a burden to men and to all of society. (*Al-Murshid*, October 20, 1916)

The Issue of Educating Women

The issue of educating women was one of the hobbyhorses of the Arab press in Chile. In 1917, *Asch-Schabibat* newspaper (August 25, 1917) launched a debate on "The Necessity to Educate Women" in the form of a writing contest; it promised the author of the best piece a yearly subscription to the newspaper. Articles published between August 25, 1917 and December 15, 1917 had a mostly reformist streak just like the editorial line: they supported the cause of educating women. In order to ensure their role as educators of future generations, women must be knowledgeable in science and literature while maintaining their roles as devoted and faithful wives and mothers.

An article written by Maria Ahues, the daughter of an intellectual in the community who would also become founder of the newspaper *Oriente* (1927), fervently advocated this image of the cultured housewife:

The house is a woman's temple of glory; it is undoubtedly the battlefield where she triumphs, the scene where she reveals herself as a true goddess.

But although home life is the one that suits a woman's temperament best, this should not stop women from acquiring culture and familiarizing themselves with science, art and literature.

None of these elements can prevent women from fulfilling their mission on earth. Quite to the contrary, they offer women the possibility to be better prepared for the role of angel of the house. (*Juventud Ilustrada*, September 15, 1918)

The arguments for engaging of women in the making of a modern society assert women's equality with men:

Psychology and ethics prove that women's intellectual competence is equal to that of men; furthermore, anatomically, there exists no difference between a man and a woman's head. (*Juventud Ilustrada*, September 15, 1918)

It is to be noted that of the 11 people who participated in the writing contest, only four were women. The articles for the emancipation of women were generally written by men.² The articles were also addressed to men because the latter are the ones primarily responsible for women's ignorance:

For the majority of oriental men, women do not need science [...] A member of the community came to pay us a visit yesterday in the evening, and upon entering he started a conversation in the following manner: "I am not enrolling [my] girls at school this year, I prefer that they stay home so that they can help their mother with house chores and learn how to keep a house. If my daughters marry middle-class men (*mutawasitī al-hal*), science will be of no use to them. However, I want [my] sons to complete their studies. And in the future, I will send them to big schools insha'Allah.

And why, dear compatriot, won't you send your daughters to school? Do they not have the right to know science just like your sons?

Put an end, Oriental men, to your domination (*istibdad*) over women, [do not abuse] our patience towards this injustice. [...]

We now live in an era of freedom and enlightenment [...]" (*Al-Murshid*, April 21, 1916)

The campaign for the education of young women became fruitful only many years later. It is not until the beginning of the 1920s that the *Al-Watan* (January 8, 1921) newspaper praised "the first Syrian young woman to graduate with a Baccalaureate" in Chile: Margarita was the daughter of Elias Sara, an immigrant from Bethlehem and a renowned merchant in his community. A celebration was consequently organized by the Saras during which Margarita played the piano for the guests. This was a practice proper to rich Chilean social milieus. Margarita was therefore an exception because of her father's socio-economic status.

The first Arab women to enroll in university belonged to Magarita's generation, but they were also exceptions. Newspapers mentioned two women who graduated from college in the second half the 1920s: Emilia Sackel as a midwife (*Oriente*, January 29, 1927) and Constance Abusleme as a nurse (*Oriente*, October 22, 1928).

The 1920s were hence a turning point in women's access to education. However, most of these women were daughters of rich immigrants. The real democratization of education for young women of Arab descent would only really start in the 1950s.

In general, the socioeconomic rise of men plays a defining role in the education of women.

2. In *Al-Murshid* issues published between 1912 and 1917, only one female author is featured: Yusufiyya Al-Baraka, the wife of a rich merchant living in the village of Vallénar. The number of female authors increased starting 1917 with *Asch-Schabibat* and mostly in the 1920s.

Wives of immigrants working in trade or industry have progressively come to embody the figure of the good and educated housewife, in conformity with the ideals preached by *nahda* philosophers and with the ideals of the middle and upper classes of Chilean society.

Wives of small merchants and peddlers, however, do not generally have access to education. They often participate in the economic activity of the family by making handcrafted items that are sold by their husbands or sons in the family shop. But this economic contribution does not question the vision of women's role and status within the family.³

The Example of the Western Woman and (Re)Defining Modern Arab Cultural Identity

The presence of various foreign communities (*colonias*) in Chile that were settled throughout the 20th century and that constituted the bulk of the upper-middle class of the country is an important element that partly determines the integration and imitation strategies used by Arab immigrants. From the time when the latter acquired a good economic status, they sought a place within the upper-middle class. This was driven by the desire to establish an Arab *colonia* capable of measuring up to other foreign communities in terms of institutional organization (by creating representative institutions) and socio-cultural levels.

Using Western women as role models is a factor in two dynamics: one linked with a reformist discourse being elaborated in the society of origin which considers the West a model of modernity and the other linked to the desire to find a place among the other foreign communities present in Chile:

When one looks at foreign women (*ajnabiyya*) such as French women, German women, or American women, one is shocked by the backwardness of Syrian women. [...] In general, Syrian men and women are subpar with Western women in terms of knowledge in science and literature. And for that, men alone are to blame, because unlike women, they enjoy their full freedom. (*Al-Murchid*, February 25, 1916)

3. No peddling activities were accounted for in women's experience in Chile, unlike what was done in the United States (Naff, in Khater 2001, p. 82). Truzzi (1997, cited in Baeza, 2010, p. 73) explains that this difference is due to the patriarchal and less pragmatic character of Latin American societies.

4. The concept of auto-Orientalism was developed by Civantos (2006) based on an analysis of the literature produced by Arab emigrants in Argentina.

We notice in this excerpt a certain orientalist tendency on the author's part.⁴ Oftentimes in the community press, reformist and modernist theories are accompanied by the essentialization of the Orient, very close to evolutionism, racism even, which is how the West perceived the Orient at the time.

In certain articles, the auto-orientalist connotation is explicit:

Our race as well as that of other oriental peoples, who are deaf to the calls of civilization and who shut the door to modernization, have preserved a primitive caveman-like vision of women; thus considering women a thing they can dispose of the way they please. (*Oriente*, February 5, 1927)

In addition to this self-criticism, it is also worth noting the discrimination endured by Arab immigrants during the first decades of living in Chile. Settling was filled with hardships. Arabs arrived in a country undergoing a crisis and socially divided to the core where pro-European racial ideology and xenophobic nationalism were growing in

popularity. Arab immigrants were quickly stigmatized and designated by the generic derogatory term “turcos” (because they immigrated with Ottoman passports), and were singled out as belonging to an uncivilized and barbaric people. Hence, it is also as a reaction to this turcophobia (Rebolledo, 1994) that the Arab community press called upon its readers to start a general reform of attitudes and a progressive recreation of cultural referents of the immigrant community: educating women was part of this grand scheme.

However, some articles cautioned readers against irrational and shallow imitation of Western customs:

I would like to tell the readers of an event I witnessed some time ago in Alexandria: one of our westernized women (*mutafaranjât*) walks into a store to buy a trendy hat. A man walks in at the same time bearing a letter in his hand. Upon noticing that the woman is occidentalized [sic], he walks up to her and asks her if she would read what is written on the envelope for him. The woman blushes with shame, and to conceal her ignorance, she blurts out: “I don’t have my glasses on me, you better ask someone else”. But what could men expect when they consider women ornaments or a source of entertainment instead of a partner? [...] In the name of God, dear men, do not hate women, educate them! (*Al-Murshid*, October 20, 1916)

The stakes of the modernization of morals are very present: a profound redefinition of identity by drawing much from modern western referents while constantly being torn between imitation and a desire to reconcile modernity with Arab cultural traditions (which have yet to be defined).

In the quest for balance between borrowing elements from the West and preserving elements from the Orient, women tend to choose values to preserve. In an article entitled “Should I Marry a Syrian Woman or a Foreigner (*ajnabiya*)?” the author declares:

Foreign women are undoubtedly the symbol of good taste, good education, and modern civilization (*tamaddun*) [...] But Syrian women are the very embodiment of faithfulness, of infallible love towards their husband and children, and they are known for their sense of sacrifice. (*Al-Watan*, December 31, 1921)

Arab women thus come to epitomize the oriental family tradition: stability at home (and in the entire nation) lies in the faithfulness and the sense of sacrifice of the wife and the mother. This vision is even more vivid when immigrants look, often contemptuously, at the more liberal morals of Chilean society.

Women in Public Places and the Issue of Honor (*Sharaf*)

Fear of Liberal Morals in the Host Society

The first immigrants to reach Chile generally had financial and cultural constraints. Just like their counterparts in other American countries, they began to work as peddlers or small merchants. Their first contact with the host society, which occurred within the Chilean lower classes, was often marked by mutual hostility: hostility of Chileans towards the “turcos” and hostility of Arab immigrants towards the “scandalous” morals of Chileans. Sometimes, this led to a phenomenon of ethnic and communal withdrawal, which was most conspicuous in the case of women.

Benedicto Chuaqui, a Syrian immigrant from Homs who went to Chile in 1908 at the age of 13, tells in his journal (1942, pp. 136-137) about a birthday party he is invited to some years after settling in Chile. The party is organized by a female Chilean teacher who lives in the neighborhood where he runs his business. He is horrified by the behavior of this young woman who had previously flirted with him by going to his store, and who on that night had drunk a lot and was seducing all the men around her. Chuaqui remembers his shock and his disgust:

How can it be that in such an organized country such as Chile, teachers are so libertine? [...]

Miss Raquel behaved on that night with more freedom than ever. She took me in her arms, kissed me and lifted me up in the air, fired up by all the drinking. But this was nothing in comparison with what she did with many of the men at the party, who were encouraging her behavior with bursts of laughter.

I am unable to explain how my strict Homs morals were bruised.

Moral liberalism is not only frowned upon; it is seen as a potential threat to the honor of the women of the community. Chuaqui (1945) thus explains his refusal to take his sister out with him:

I felt sad for not being able to take my sister along to relax during moments of leisure. Given that she is a woman and given the impertinence so characteristic of Chilean men when they have been drinking, I could not bring myself to do it. She would go to the home of relatives where she would spend hours reminiscing about our beloved Homs. (p. 183)

The presence of Arab women in Chilean public places is thus seen as a hazard because the rules that regulate the community do not exist in public places. It is better for women to stay in an environment where community social control exists: that is, in the company of relatives or compatriots who share the same sense of protecting honor. It is to be noted that Arab women working for small merchants in the family business were not seen in a negative light despite their constant contact with Chilean clientele. This was due to the fact that the store was generally in the family residence and was thus considered an extension of the home. Hence, the fact that women were contributing to the family's economic situation was, in this case, a pragmatic choice which reduced work costs and enabled immigrants to save money faster (Chuaqui, 1945, p. 190).

These strategies are denounced by the press who sees them as one of the reasons why Arab women of the diaspora are lagging behind:

If [Arab] men would enroll their daughters in reputable schools so that they receive a good education rather than think of money and put them behind a *mostrador* [counter] till the end of their days [...] oriental women of the diaspora would be the most advanced on all levels. (*Asch-Schabibat*, October 20, 1917)

Women's Honor and Social Capital

The issue of honor is central with respect to defining the role and status of women.

Honor is considered a quintessential quality in a woman, one that is closely linked to her behavior:

Modesty [*'affa*] is a woman's beauty and pride. If she loses it, she loses her past, present, future, and most importantly her honor [...] Modesty is the root of all the other qualities one finds in a believer [...] Faith, truthfulness, bashfulness, dignity and honor". (*Asch-Schabibat*, December 15, 1917)

But women's honor is not only about an essentialized view of femininity, it also defines the family's reputation and social capital within the community. Preserving women's honor is a shared responsibility and the men of the family are its protectors. This is the reason why most articles trying to push for the education of women (and their access to schools) address men. The strategy is to convince fathers that education would give their daughters sufficient social capital to accomplish their primary mission – that of being a woman and wife – without endangering the honor of the family. Evidently, not all agree:

One day, I told a rich Syrian man who displays prestige and eminence: "I advise you to enroll your daughters in school because we live in the era of science". He replied: "Why is that? So they can marry scientists? Scientists only marry women for their beauty and their wealth! Science is for men, not women. Because a woman's knowledge of science is a threat to the honor [*sharaf*] of her relatives. A woman's honor is for her to stay at home. (*Al-Murchid*, February 25, 1916)

Women and Social Work

Various press articles pointed out the fact that women do not participate enough in the community's social activities:

In 1917, Emilia Mubarak, the wife of one of the community's thinkers and reforming leaders, Issa Khalil Daccarett, published an article in which she summoned her "sisters" to form a women's organization in Chile, just as Arab immigrant women had done in other American countries: "the purpose is to join our voices and actions with those of our renowned sisters in the United States and elsewhere, for they are doing good deeds and aiding afflicted compatriots" (*Asch-Schabibat*, May 26, 1917).

But the project never materialized. Its failure was linked to the issue of women's presence in public places and the social reprehension that came with it: "the majority [of men in the community] think of the bigger picture: women who are present in society and work in associations, isn't that '*ayb* (shameful)?" (*Asch-Schabibat*, October 20, 1917).

Advocates of women's education were also advocates of women's participation in the community's social life. Here as well, using westerners or foreigners as a referent supported this argument:

Women remain marginalized [from the community's social activities] and any Westerner who looks closely at our situation [...] or takes part in our celebrations, would immediately notice the void created in our social lives because of the absence of women. (*Asch-Sschabibat* January 12, 1918)

It is to be noted that the women from the different foreign *colonias* (immigrant enclaves) which settled in Chile were generally involved in benevolent institutions and participated alongside their husbands in social events organized by their community.

The Pivotal 1920s

The desire to measure up to other foreign *colonias* paved the way for women's social participation. It is only in the second half of the 1920s that many charities run by Arab women were established, following the creation of the Syrian-Palestinian Orthodox Ladies Society (*Oriente*, March 26, 1927) and the Lebanese Ladies Association (*Oriente*, June 25, 1927). Furthermore, women began to attend celebrations organized by the community's social clubs – spaces until then fully reserved for men. For the inauguration of the Syrian-Palestinian Club, the *Oriente* newspaper praised the fact that “a large number of refined women of our community have added a lively and jovial note to the celebration” (*Oriente*, April 9, 1927).

In the wake of World War I, the arrival of new and socially active immigrant women into the intellectual circle brought a new mix to the participation of women in the public sphere. One of the most important figures from among these women was Marie Yanni founder and editor-in-chief of the women's magazine *Minerva* in Beirut. She got married to Ibrahim Attallah, a great Syrian merchant who settled in Chile toward the beginning of the century. Marie Yanni was the first woman to be invited to give a public talk before the community. In her talk she addressed her fellow countrymen regarding the inauguration of the Syrian-Palestinian club and encouraged women's charity work (*Oriente*, April 9, 1927).

But the question of the preservation of women's honor within public space was also part of this debate even though the limits and boundaries have changed: while some demanded that their female compatriots imitate foreign women from other immigrant communities in all social activities, others preferred relinquishing bourgeois etiquette to protect women's decency and their family's reputation. An article published in the late 1920s entitled “Sports and Dance in our Colony” criticized the very limited spread of these activities among young women. It emphasized “the terror that Western dance causes in our Colony, particularly in fathers [...] always concerned with the fatal judging eye of others” (*Oriente*, April 23, 1927).

The article highlighted the importance of these activities in order for immigrants to integrate in the social life of the Chilean upper-middle classes:

Dance, in the times we live in [...], is part of an individual's education and is an almost moral social obligation, for anyone who wishes to become part of society. In any social gathering, however small, dance is of utmost importance, and the person who does not know it will immediately be considered uneducated and will be looked down on by his/her friends [...]

With the advent of the 1930s, the phenomenon of imitating the Chilean bourgeoisie and aristocracy developed in the wealthy classes of Arabs in Chile. Hence, many wives and daughters of wealthy immigrants started creating their own charities and organizing fairs, dancing tea parties, and fundraising campaigns to help those in need.

Conclusion

The few elements elaborated on above tackled the issue of the connection between the phenomenon of immigration and the process of redefining group identity and the social representation of women within the immigrant community. Have immigration and contact with Chilean society, which subverted the family's structure and the definition of social gender roles, paved the way for the emancipation demanded by the advocates of *nahda*? Or did the need to ensure the group's cohesion in foreign territory, along with some resistance to the morals of the lower class of the host society, push for a more conservative role for women in the family and host society?

As we have seen, there is no one answer to these questions. The rethinking of the question of women's place or role in the host society is a balancing act between their relationship to the society of origin and their gradual integration in the host society. This process is also linked to the socioeconomic status of immigrants. The economic rise and the progressive integration of some of them helped emphasize women's education as well as their presence in public places. However, the phenomenon remained limited to the upper socioeconomic classes of the community. The 1920s marked the beginning of a phenomenon of acculturation that manifested itself through upper and middle classes' imitation of Chilean society. This will be a key element in the definition of the collective identity of the Arab *colonia* in Chile.

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Fading Photographs:

Recollections of the Chouf in Caparaó

Miriam Ayres

Se souvenir – du basilic et du pommier, du sirop de mûres et des amandiers. Nadia Tueni

To remember – the basil and the apple tree, blackberry syrup and the almond trees. Nadia Tueni



Miriam Ayres, Private Collection.

In the Grandparents' House

A popular Brazilian proverb maintains that "*Quem conta um conto aumenta um ponto*" ("Whoever tells a tale twists it without fail"). This adage suggests that listeners should react cautiously to the stories they are told, for their content has almost certainly been distorted or, to put it benevolently, artfully recreated. The saying also offers a cautionary note to the storyteller, since she may encounter listeners who are skeptical or completely indifferent.

Stories of forced displacement offer even more obstacles to the credibility of the narrator: they are fragmented, incongruous, romanticized, and at times tinged with the resentment of exile. These tales of fleeing the old country to build a life in a new place, orally transmitted from one member of the exilic community to another in bits and pieces, are usually reserved for the few patient listeners capable of experiencing the past as a historical drama. They are unafraid of crumbling houses and unfashionable company and admire fading portraits and furniture.



Miriam Ayres, Private Collection.

Children are almost always ideal listeners. Their immigrant grandparents' funny accents tinged with words from a foreign language easily lull them into a world of snow-frosted mountains, bleating sheep and stone houses – the stuff of fairy tales for children in a half-forgotten town in South America. And children are particularly drawn to forms of visual stimulation, like old photographs, that trigger long stories and inspire storytellers. These talismans immediately transport both the storyteller and the listeners to a remote world where life follows the rhythms of nature, until it is transformed irreparably by war, famine, and displacement.

During a childhood that my sister and I spent in our Lebanese grandparents' home, three photographs generated stories that we heard repeatedly and in turn reinvented and retold ourselves. All three featured stern-looking men who inspired our curiosity and fear. This triangle of men spurred us to ask questions to our grandparents that they generally ignored, preferring to talk of life in the village. Instead they listed the names of the cast of characters appearing in each of the three pictures, all men save for one lonely young woman seated at the end of the front row of a large portrait (see picture on page 56).

The first was an official portrait of Camille Chamoun taken during his visit to Brazil in 1954. The image of the pompous Lebanese president was the centerpiece of our grandfather's salon, placed beside his favorite carriage clock. Chamoun was our *jiddi's* (our grandfather)'s political idol, a statesman ordained to protect the Maronite community and guarantee the stability necessary so that my sister and I, his favorite granddaughters, could attend college in Beirut, which we never did.

The face of the doomed president never scared us the way the others did. It remained on our grandparents' wall until *jiddi's* death decades later at the age of 100. Growing up we were so accustomed to seeing Chamoun as a head of state that for us he became the epitome of authority, greater in our eyes than the presidents of our own country whose names we learned at school. To us his eyes seemed permanently directed toward the future in the place to which we truly belonged.

The second photograph was preserved in my grandparents' family album and depicted the visit of a Maronite missionary to the Lebanese community in Manhuaçu, in which many Lebanese émigrés settled. The third hung on the wall of my

grandparents' living room next to Chamoun's, and was an artfully retouched portrait of six of my grandmother's paternal uncles taken at the turn of the century in Beirut (see picture on page 57). This last photograph was the only one from Lebanon that my grandparents carried with them to Brazil; its story partially explains the course of their lives and our own somewhat tangled origins.

These three photographs were family blazons and proofs of our history, testaments to both a period of material wealth and forebodings of the imminent

tragedies that followed.

Images are generally guarded and treasured because they recall happier times.

These pictures were also our passport to a past country that came alive every evening when our grandparents'

émigré friends visited, bringing their grandchildren along with them to play with us while they all engaged in endless conversations in Arabic, which our generation barely understood.

A Tattered Picture, a Family's Division

Images are generally guarded and treasured because they recall happier times. However, the photographs and tattered remnants of pictures in my grandparents' house evoked memories of deprivation and loss. They seemed to confirm the family members' perception that they had been persecuted in Lebanon while treated as outsiders in their adopted country.

The photograph of the Maronite missionary, which marked a happy moment for the members of the Lebanese community in our town, was itself the recipient of an unhappy fate. One day our aunt, *tia* Regina, lifted it from the family album where as a boy her younger brother Abdallah had scribbled ink shoes onto some of the subjects. She then lent it to another man in the photograph who had lost his own copy and wished for a replacement.

A few months later when she asked to have the photograph back, he said he had lost it without a trace as he had made no copy. As a result of his cavalier attitude toward the treasured image, she went on to harbor a deep enmity toward his entire family until her sudden death at the age of 56. Only recently did his daughter return the damaged original to our mother Linda. The sacred image has been restored and copies sent to the relatives of the men in the portrait as far as Beirut and the Chouf in Lebanon.

This salvaged photograph dating back to 1938 shows twenty Lebanese émigrés as they began to build families and fortune in Brazil. Taken in Manhuaçu, the mountain hamlet located at the foot of the Caparaó range in the state of Minas Gerais where I was born and raised and where my mother still lives, it shows the priest in his cassock seated in the center, the little boy in shorts beside him, surrounded by stocky dark-haired, dark-eyed men – most mustachioed – in fresh pressed suits. These men from the Chouf were mostly Maronite (there were a few Druze among them) and arrived in Brazil in the mid-1910s seeking work and fleeing the Great War. Most were hired by their Italian precursors as immigrant laborers, as coffee crop sharers, coffee-processing machine sellers, or storekeepers.

By the time the camera snapped the picture two decades later almost all its men had become wealthy, esteemed citizens of the town. On the day it was shot, our grandfather and his best friend, the powerful Seu Felipinho, brought along their oldest sons. But the storeowner Seu Fares, out of open-mindedness, was responsible for the presence of the only woman in the portrait, his oldest daughter Nazira. The history of this photograph, which provides a portrait of the first generation of the Lebanese in town, tells another story, that of how my grandparents' children – my mother and aunts and uncles – dealt with and recounted their parents' past.

In our grandparents' tidy album, this photo was uncharacteristically marred by the ink doodles added by Abdallah, who appears in the picture

at our grandfather's side. He chose four people's feet on which to scribble: his own, two men, and Nazira's. What did he mean by marking both his feet and a single shoe on three other selected pairs of feet, as opposed to simply adding horns or mustaches to the subjects' faces, as children often mischievously do?

Perhaps he was signaling the special fate of those he chose: himself, primogeniture of the family; the two men, who would go on to hold positions of financial leadership in the community; and the young woman who would become an accomplished educator and writer.

At the time, my grandfather, a born leader, was struggling to make ends meet but posed proudly with his appointed successor. He, however, was wrong about the son he saw as the second patriarch. Our *jiddi*, once a silk trader, had a talent for politics and engineering and did not usually miscalculate, but he erred in believing his first-born son would build upon his legacy. *Jiddi's* mistake would create a new dynamic in the family and cause irreconcilable divisions.

When *jiddi* saw his oldest son – a fluent Arabic speaker and, like his father, a natural engineer – drop out of high school, marry a domineering woman and spiral into debt, his first instinct was naturally to help him. But despite a lucrative career as a car mechanic and my *jiddi's* continuous attempts to help him, *tio* Abdallah quickly developed health problems that matched his financial misfortunes. His wife and daughter, having realized that our *jiddi* would always rescue his oldest son, continually drained his financial resources. In the afternoons, when her oldest son came home to ask for food and loans, our *sitti* (our grandmother) walked about the house cursing his family, a stream of horrible words in Arabic flowing from her mouth. Then, at the end of the afternoon, when our *jiddi* came home, her fury fell upon him. It was from her fits of fury that we learned to curse in Arabic.

Tired of his wife's verbal abuse, *jiddi* picked a daughter to rule over the small empire he had built.

A harsh and at times impulsive person, he passed over our mother Linda, keeper of family memories, and chose his favorite daughter, our aunt Anice, as Abdallah's successor.

But *tia* Anice did not care about her new position. Her major concern was social mobility. She had no time to waste perfecting her Arabic or managing our grandfather's business. She moved to Rio, worked for a fashion designer and married a wealthy architect. Her beauty was her passport into sophisticated circles, and her obsession with the rules of etiquette inspired us, her nieces, to move on from the parochialism of our town to develop our own taste for elegant fashion and dining. Only much later were we to understand that by adopting this upwardly-mobile lifestyle *tia* Anice was merely following the ethos of the Lebanese immigrants who had arrived early on in the twentieth century.

Despite *tia* Anice's apparent disinterest in family lore, every time she came from Rio to visit us she sat down and worked patiently with *jiddi* to trace the origin of our family. Their collaboration ultimately resulted in a detailed family tree. They were able to identify our grandparents and great-grandparents

and tracked our grandmother's great-grandmother, Yasmine, allegedly of French descent. Anice's discovery

reinforced her pretense of being European, and she became a proponent of the idea that this trace of French blood that we allegedly carried shaped who we were culturally. Paradoxically, however, this carefully-constructed family tree only increased our interest in Lebanon – an interest which bordered on obsession.

My mother Linda married "below her station" at a time when our *jiddi* finally achieved a respectable

Tired of his wife's verbal abuse, *jiddi* picked a daughter to rule over the small empire he had built.

financial position. In spite of the resentment she felt toward her parents and siblings from a young age, she turned out to be the Lebanese-Brazilian equivalent of Cordelia. In Shakespearean fashion, she became the keeper of family traditions and the most devoted child of our early widower *jiddi*. Although he was in excellent health well into his nineties, as he approached one hundred his eyesight

As the youngest and only girl, she was not allowed to learn to read or write, and it was simply assumed that she would marry at an early age, as indeed happened.

began to fail, and for the last few years of his life it was Linda, the child he'd largely left on her own, who tenderly tended to him until his unfortunate passing.

Linda's arresting looks matched her name (appropriately, in Portuguese, 'linda' means 'beautiful') but her independence and stubborn sense of morality often compelled her to disagree with other members of the family. Born and reared in Brazil, she eagerly embraced her Lebanese roots, and through her we came to learn the details of our grandparents' families, their historical alliances and disputes, origins in the Chouf, and their own prejudices and the suffering they endured growing up. After the death of *tio* Abdallah, who visited her in the afternoons to reminisce over coffee and cake, Linda became a living archive of documents, recipes, historical events, knickknacks, and old resentments.

It is from her that we learned the story of the third photograph – the only one of the three from the old country and the one that had scared us as children – definitive proof that we were not immune to the abrupt transitions of history as so many other Brazilians seemed to be. But that photograph also transmitted to us, the children of the third generation, the fatalism that marked our traumatized *sitti*, who was never able to assimilate the inherent optimism of the New World.

We are from Fowara: Where is Fowara?

Linda removed this last photograph from our grandparents' wall and kept it wrapped in white silk paper, like a piece of jewelry. It is a heavily retouched group portrait showing six gentlemen dressed in formal attire, their eyes piercing the viewer's, looking slightly askance as if lost in reflection. The one in the center with a moustache and a *tarbush* is, Linda informed us, *sitti's* eldest paternal uncle Assad. In the row behind him appears another uncle, the authoritative *khoury* (i.e. priest) Boutros. Assad is flanked by Charif, also in a *tarbush*, and Felipe, who looks handsomely modern. On *khoury* Boutros's left and right are the mustachioed Salle and the charming Suleiman, the first to arrive in Brazil, where he was eventually murdered in a political dispute.

Linda recounts the story of this group photograph with the subtly caustic tone of her mother, Nabiha. *Sitti* was the only daughter of a wealthy family of male silk-makers and traders who lived in Fowara, a small town in the Lebanese Chouf, in a stately stone house next to a grove of mulberry trees where lavish lunches were served on Sundays. As the youngest and only girl, she was not allowed to learn to read or write, and it was simply assumed that she would marry at an early age, as indeed happened.

Later in life, I learned that Lebanese family dramas in the old country and in exile follow a predictable pattern: after the patriarch dies, infighting breaks out. Family members trade accusations, destroy and forge new alliances, and, in the end, refuse to forgive each other or each other's friends. But it was not always so... The priest, the central figure in Nabiha's gallery of close relatives, was revered and referred to simply as *khoury*, which along with *hakim* (i.e. doctor) we learned both to fear and respect. He was especially honored because he had taken in our young *sitti* after she became orphaned during the early years of World War I as Ottoman troops seized food supplies in the Chouf, causing widespread starvation.

Nabiha's two oldest children were Adma, born in 1913 after she first married my *jiddi*, and Adèle,

born a few months after our grandfather left for Brazil. They were both raised in the *khoury's* house. The girls, however, did not survive the famine that we were told followed a devastating locust plague in Mount Lebanon. They were remembered as martyrs, and their story made us fear war, starvation, and the possibility of becoming refugees ourselves. After she lost her baby girls, Nabiha fled from the priest's home to Syria on foot to look for work as a maid. She did not want to become a burden on her uncle, who had to support his family of six. Of Nabiha's life in Syria, we were never told anything, but apparently she returned to Lebanon and was eventually contacted by a relative in Brazil who wrote to tell her that *jiddi* was living in Manhuaçu. More than a decade after her husband had left, her two daughters had died, and the priest had taken her into his home, she arrived in Brazil on a cargo ship.

An immigrant in a country she never loved, she distrusted Brazilians, worked from dawn to night, frantically economized on food, water, and clothing and cursed her husband and her children, bemoaning their fate. She only showed affection to cats and to her cousin Emeline, who left Fowara shortly after her own belated re-encounter with her husband. Our grandmother never learned Portuguese, and when she spoke to us in Arabic it was usually to reprimand us or to entice us to eat homemade Arabic sweets.

For *sitti*, who seemed to us to have been born melancholic and disillusioned, the world offered only perils. She started her days by hurling insults at her husband and blaming him for his extravagant generosity to friends and guests alike. He was vain, she was frugal; he was bold while she was timid. During their life together they never seemed to consider the possibility of attempting to harmonize differences. In fact, over time the differences only accentuated, making the couple even more unhappy. But they remained oddly, stubbornly loyal to one another, locked in a relationship that transcended the vows of marriage: our grandparents, we shockingly discovered during our adolescence, were also first cousins. In the new country such kinship relations were not acceptable

and we feared that our grandparents, our mother Linda, her siblings and we, who lived and behaved so differently from most Brazilians, carried some illness related to our incestuous condition.

Unlike Nabiha, who praised the *khoury* Boutros, *jiddi*, who was himself

a nephew of Boutros, suppressed the priest entirely from his stories of life in the Chouf. *Jiddi* never spoke about his engagement to Nabiha

or about his uncle, Boutros,

who had arranged the marriage. Instead, he told us stories of his apricots, his herd of sheep, the snow-covered peaks that melted and created the springs that gave Fowara its name. He told us that their village was near Beirut, a city he had seen only briefly as he passed through on his way to the port to take the cargo ship to São Paulo.

Our grandfather's Lebanon was a place of abundance and natural beauty that would have lasted forever had it not been for the odious Turks whom he hated his entire life. Our grandmother remembered the Lebanon of her protective family, of her cousin Linda whom she saw as a sister, of the dead baby girls, of the heat on the road to Syria on which she had departed on foot. Lebanon for us was two: the Lebanon of our grandfather, of plentiful and yielding lands, and the Lebanon of our grandmother, a place of famine and fleeing villagers. Yet, ironically, it was she, not he, who eternally longed to return home and to the company of her beloved uncle and cousin.

It was not until much later, when my sister and I finally went to Beirut armed with the family tree, that we were able to confirm details of our grandparents' stories. We had decided to make a

Our grandmother never learned Portuguese, and when she spoke to us in Arabic it was usually to reprimand us or to entice us to eat homemade Arabic sweets.

pilgrimage to Fowara, without anyone's assistance, but the village did not even appear on our map of Lebanon. We went to a bookstore in Beirut and asked the owner, who said he had never heard of the town. This may have been so because we pronounced the name of the village with a very Brazilian inflection. Discouraged, we called our mother in Brazil, who mentioned as a point of reference the castle in the town of Beiteddine.

We left early the next morning on board a bus. The passengers eagerly became involved in our quest and, using bits of French and Arabic, helped direct the driver to a well-known spot where he dropped us off. There we spent a sleepless, anxious night, the only guests in a former Ottoman castle. After breakfast, we left the hotel toward Fowara. I wanted to emulate *sitti* and walk, but my sister

I thought of *sitti* and her perennially dark universe and tried to imagine her life a hundred years earlier in this place.

quickly vetoed the plan, and when an old Mercedes taxi appeared out of nowhere we hopped in and told the driver to take us to the center of Fowara. Fifteen minutes

later, he stopped in a windy place where we could hear the steady sound of water flowing and see what appeared to be the site of a church under construction. A man stumbling along the road, talking to himself, managed a mumbled greeting and disappeared; there was no one else. We looked at one another in a panic. Was this it? We had come all the way from New York and the south of Brazil to find this dried-out village sealed off by barren mountains and ghostly images of the Virgin Mary? I thought of *sitti* and her perennially dark universe and tried to imagine her life a hundred years earlier in this place.

I wanted to leave, but my sister insisted that we go on. And on we went through this seemingly depopulated hamlet until my sister spied a man

carrying a jug of olives and asked him in French if he knew where we could find the members of the Fadlallah family. Monsieur Said, which was how he introduced himself, invited us first to his own home for tea, where we met his family. He then took us to the house of the widow of one of *jiddi's* cousins, where we spent the entire afternoon eating peaches and discussing the family tree that we brought from Brazil (in a mix of French and Arabic) with a dozen neighbors and newfound relatives. Word of our arrival in Fowara spread quickly, and by the next afternoon we found ourselves the guests of honor at a hastily arranged reception with fifty relatives from the Eid and Fadlallah clans in Beirut hosted by a newfound cousin, Fares, a diplomat who had lived in Venezuela.

Fares in turn led us to *sitt* (i.e. lady) Linda, our *sitti* Nabiha's cousin and the daughter of Boutros, who lived with her son and his family in the city. We gave her a copy of the photograph of her father and another of *sitti* in Brazil. She did not seem the least bit surprised to see us and spoke of her father and of their lives and of Nabiha in great detail. As the closest living family member in Lebanon she seemed to us like a kind of oracle. She confirmed many of the stories we had been told, including that of babies Adma and Adèle whom she said "weren't strong enough to survive anyways." A dry and stoic woman, she nonetheless embraced us as if we were her grandchildren. In doing so, she made us feel part of the alliance that had been forged during the Ottoman period in the Chouf between the Eids and the Fadlallahs by *khoury* Boutros. Later when *sitt* Linda died at the age of 98, shortly after the assassination of Rafik Hariri in February 2005, our connection to Lebanon was severed. Without her presence as a living medium between the old world and the new, most of our other relatives in Beirut appeared to have lost interest in us.

As for Boutros and his brothers, their image continues to reign imposingly on the wall of my sister's foyer in southern Brazil. A conduit between generations, Boutros is an idol for our aunts and mother, Nabiha's Brazilian daughters. Growing up, my mother told us that he had saved our *sitti* during the war and that our family would not have

existed were it not for his efforts and compassion. And during our pilgrimage to the East we had actually met Nabiha's cousin and companion, *sitt* Linda, the daughter of the ghostly man in the photograph – the priest who had a wife and children – and through her found a tactile tie to what had heretofore seemed a fragile and invented Lebanese identity.

But Boutros would have been nothing more than an oral myth had it not been for the women who literally dug him out of the shards of war and kept his memory alive. In the 1940s, in a visit to Fowara, *sitti's* cousin Emeline, who had also migrated to Manhuacu, had found, in an unintended exercise in affective archeology, the badly stained photograph of Boutros and his brothers in the ruins of what had been my grandmother's family home. Upon her return to Brazil, she had the photo restored and gave a copy of it to Nabiha, who in turn passed it on to Linda, who gave it to her daughter. The short tale of our origins in the Chouf that is recounted here would have vanished from memory had it not been for the photo and the vivid recollections it

sparked in our mother Linda. It is she who, at 82, sits with us over coffee and spins stories of friends, cousins, and villages that she derives from the old photographs she managed to keep. Like a museum guide, she tells us how each piece was rescued. She then recounts the stories of each of the men and women in the picture as if their lives had become timeless. She talks about her mother Nabiha, who never loved her, as if she was a heroine, of *sitt* Linda, as a beauty who endured only hardship, of Emeline, our grandmother's manipulative cousin, as a person our naïve *sitti* chose as a confidant, and of babies Adma and Adèle whom she oddly mourns. The content of her stories may seem romantic, but she narrates them in a form that varies between documentary and novel. In either form, she returns to them each time adding an omitted detail that brings our Lebanese heritage nearer to us.

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Archival Photos of Women Immigrants

The following collection of pictures chosen from the Archives of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at Notre Dame University - Louaize, Lebanon shed light on the Lebanese immigrant women in Latin America.



Alice Schuery and Elias Wakim on their wedding day, *Juliana Schuery Collection*, April 25, 1920.



Leia Gabriel, cousin of Mr. Albert Nehme in Porto Alegre, *Amin Nehme Collection*, Brazil, 1968.



Linda Bedran, *Mary Bedran Collection*, Brazil, ca.1920.



Therese Bou Saleh Al Doueihy, *Mohsen Yamine Collection*, Mexico [no date available].



Maria Margareth, daughter of Yaacoub El Bainsi, *Joe Malkoun Collection*, Brazil, 1968.



Wedding of Edmond and Alice, *Mohsen Yamine Collection*, Mexico [no date available].



Mona Akl, Wife of Toufic Makhoul, *LERC Collection*, Mexico, 1956.



The First Lebanese Delegation Gathering in Dar Al Moufawadia in Rio de Janeiro, *Sheikh Melhem Ibrahim Talhouk and Najla Abdelmalak Talhouk Collection*, 1948.

Book Reviews

Mujeres árabes de Colombia (Arab Women from Colombia) by Pilar Vargas A. and Luz Marina Suaza V. Bogotá: Planeta, 2011.

REVIEWED BY GEORGE A. ABDELNOUR

Mujeres árabes de Colombia is a well-meaning attempt to give voice to the undocumented experience of Arab women in Latin America, specifically Colombia. The book comprises twenty-four personal narratives of Colombo-Arab women of diverse religious and national origins, descendants or first generation immigrants from the Levant. Though not strictly an academic work, the book serves its purpose by offering readers insights into the multiple personal realms of Arab women's experience in Colombia, in the process highlighting their challenges, successes, and continued negotiation of cultural identity as Arab diasporic subjects in their host country.

The many voices found in the pages of this well-edited book, though often framed and implicitly mediated by the book's coeditors, give testimony to the complexity and diversity of Arab women's histories in Colombia, allowing readers to ask broader questions about the migration of culture and the role of gender. Accomplished women abound in the pages of the book (the book betrays a bit of bias by focusing on "successful" immigrant women by and large, a common leitmotiv in Lebanese emigration studies), and the predominance of self-identified Lebanese women is a reminder of the deep links between Lebanon and the Americas. Among these women is the story of famed Colombian poet Meira del Mar, born Olga Chams Eljach to Lebanese immigrants who settled in Colombia in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and well-known for anthologies of Spanish verse cherished all over Latin America. Zheger Hay Harb, whose Bekaa-born parents settled in Colombia's Caribbean coast, is memorable for her political engagement and for joining Colombia's guerilla movement in the 1960s, one of only a handful of women to do so. Younger characters describing their cultural experiences include Tatiana El Jeaid Hamade, an accomplished psychologist who, in a poignant reflection on living in a predominantly Catholic country, asks: "I am Muslim and a feminist. Is this compatible?" ["Soy musulmana pero soy feminista, es esto compatible?"]. Other women of Lebanese origin describe their professional rise in the fields of business and politics, such as Colombian Ambassador to Lebanon Rida Mariette Aljure Salame.

Many other unique voices abound as well. The case of Palestinian women such as Nazmia Ambra de Nofal is a case in point, as she retells her back-and-forth experience between Colombia and the West Bank, recovering lost Palestinian traditions of embroidery and cuisine to carry back to Colombia. Karen David Daccaret, of Bethlehem stock, recounts her love for Islamic art and the old Levantine tradition of mother-of-pearl inlay furniture which together with her husband she introduces to a local Colombian audience through writing and conferences on the subject. As she puts it, this personal devotion to the art of *nácar* represents a personal quest for her Palestinian roots: acts of cultural recovery and preservation are a common theme in the self-narratives of the leading women in this book. *Mujeres árabes* is concluded by a short personal reflection on her Colombian and Arab roots by renowned pop-star Shakira, not a standard subject of academic study but an interesting voice nevertheless.

As a series of personal narratives, *Mujeres árabes de Colombia* bears close resemblance to a standard genre of Latin American writing: the *testimonio* or testimony of the subaltern subject who has been silenced, reminding us of the well-known account of Guatemalan indigenous activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú in the famous account titled *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983). This genre requires that the personal account be accepted by the reader as "real" and trustworthy, though

we know that attempts to narrate one's life are also subject to the narrative conventions of fiction, such as the reconstruction of memory or the ordering of events in linear time. As such, *Mujeres árabes de Colombia* would benefit from a self-reflective postscript on the fallibility of personal accounts, urging readers to treat these as narrative constructs even while accepting the legitimacy of their content, a task the book falls short of doing. But perhaps this is understandable given the text's other priorities and pre-established scope.

Together with *Pequeño equipaje, grandes ilusiones: La migración árabe a Colombia* [*Small Suitcase, Big Illusions: Arab Migration to Colombia*], written by co-editor Pilar Vargas Arana and published simultaneously in 2011, the present book offers a useful handbook for a deeper understanding of Lebanese and Arab women's experience in Latin America. As such it is a worthy contribution to a subject in need of further exploration, as well as to the interdisciplinary meeting of Middle Eastern and Latin American cultural studies.

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Nazira Zeineddine: A Pioneer of Islamic Feminism, by miriam cooke*. Ser. Makers of the Muslim World. Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2010. xix + 142 pages.

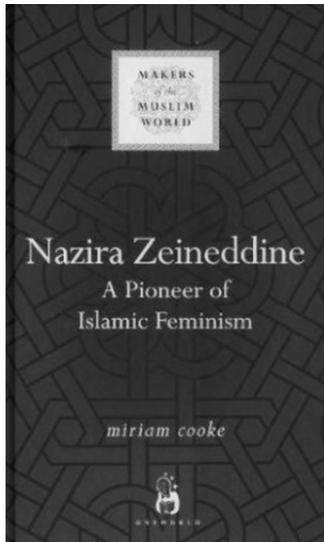
REVIEWED BY MARILYN BOOTH

In 1927, nineteen-year-old Nazira Zayn al-Din began to write in response to a campaign in mandate-era Syria to force its female subjects to wear face veils. What she envisioned as a short oration or essay saw its way into print as a substantial tome in 1928, under the title *al-Sufur wa'l-Hijab (Unveiling and Veiling)*. Written in a rhetorical style that careens between scholarly citation and polemic, oralistic second-person singular address and the oratory of collective address, the book is embedded in the local-regional discourses of its era: on gender right, on the quality and nature of European practices adopted by local elites, on the contemporaneity of Islam as lived practice.

Though *Unveiling and Veiling* had its strong supporters, its publication set off a firestorm of accusations and counter-arguments. It resulted in one of numerous discursive eruptions from the late 19th through the early 20th century amongst Arabic-speaking elites that put the politics of gender and home at the symbolic and lived centre of national survival. Happily for later researchers, Zayn al-Din (cooke has chosen to use the French-inflected version of Nazira's family name, Zeineddine) collected many of the reviews, charges, and accolades that arose from her first book in her second volume, *al-Fatat wa'l-Shuyukh (The Young Woman and the Shaykhs, 1929)*, an attempt at self-explanation and self-justification. As Zayn al-Din seizes the opportunity to put her own case together via the words of others, she continues her fierce and often derisive one-woman campaign against some individuals in the religious establishment. How selective was her presentation of reactions to her book? As miriam cooke notes in her biography of Zayn al-Din, *The Young Woman and the Shaykhs* brings together reactions from far outside the Arab world, though (as cooke doesn't note) this 'international attention' (xi) appears to have been largely limited to Arabic-language journals, which were published from Sao Paolo to the Indian subcontinent (The French-language organ of the Egyptian Feminist Union, *L'Egyptienne*, did announce and welcome *al-Sufur wa'l-hijab*).¹ But Zayn al-Din's call did not seem to have had a lasting echo. After a few more years of public work and writing, she disappeared, more or less, from the public eye.

Born in 1908 to a Druze lawyer who had studied at leading Ottoman institutions and the formally educated daughter of a high-ranking Ottoman army officer, Nazira was raised by parents who cared about education for girls as well as boys. She dedicated *Unveiling and Veiling* to her father, and cooke emphasizes Sa'id Bek Zayn al-Din's strong role in his daughter's intellectual and political formation. Cooke stages several conversations between them that draw on Zayn al-Din's written argumentation. Ensnared in Ottoman and Syrian intellectual circles, Sa'id Bek encouraged Nazira's entry into the fray and fury of public discourse. Neither daughter nor father, it appears, expected the uproar that "the young woman" (she referred to herself as *al-fatat*, which is usually understood as an unmarried but maturing girl).

Zayn al-Din went on to marry (at an unusually late age for her time and place) and live the life of an elite Lebanese Druze woman until her death in 1976. One of cooke's purposes here is to trace the apparently quiet period after Nazira's public career, and she has elicited much biographical information from interviews with relatives, visits to homes Nazira lived in, and a reading of her books that is sensitive to autobiographical clues. While there is clearly a sympathetic link between biographer and subject, cooke is also carefully critical: she notes that Zayn al-Din's strident tone, which was often explicitly directed against particular leading religious authorities, and her attempt



Portrait of young Nazira



Nazira at a later stage in her life

to present herself as a “transcendental authority” (p. 96), likely worked against any possibility of real dialogue. Perhaps, ironically, this rhetorical boldness contributed to Zayn al-Din’s eclipse as a public intellectual. It’s a fascinating case. Cooke doesn’t speculate on its illustrative capacity beyond the immediate context, but this story has all the ingredients of a “perfect storm” that might be a lively starting point for cross-regional comparison. It’s a tale that juxtaposes a supportive, enthusiastic, and influential father with the relative isolation from social discourse that Zayn al-Din and other intellectual women before and after her have railed against – not to mention the disapproval or more active opposition across cultures and eras that women who challenge established interpretations of sacred texts have encountered. Was it the case simply that ‘the clerics had won’ (p. xi)? Or do the responses to Zayn al-Din’s book and her subsequent invisibility exemplify how gender activisms (in different eras and areas) can be both fostered and restrained by structural constraints and social forces? Was Zayn al-Din’s public act doomed from the start by the very conditions that gave rise to it? If Cooke does not address these questions, this concise review implicitly raises them.

Cooke set out to produce a biography, and she has offered us a lively, creative, and thoughtful interpretation of an intriguing subject’s life. The book is a pleasure to read, and Cooke’s elaboration of her methodology clarifies for readers the innovative way she has chosen to approach her topic. She reads visual and material ‘texts’ such as Zayn al-Din’s surroundings (domestic furnishings, rooms, facades), as well as her writings and counter-writings in response to her writings, and traces of commentary by those who knew Zayn al-Din. She weaves the insights garnered from these sources into a set of lively scenes and conversations in addition to giving a more conventional narrative of Zayn al-Din’s life and oeuvre. The translated excerpts that Cooke offers give a sense of Zayn al-Din’s rhetoric and focus, and Cooke has cleverly used the author’s second-person direct address strategy, employed effectively in *Unveiling and Veiling*, within a conversational context in the biography. Yet, I have some quarrels with this treatment. I am uneasy with Cooke’s decision to collapse together quotations from different sections of Zayn al-Din’s first book, often without indicating where one passage ends and another begins. I wonder, too, whether creating

conversations out of these written texts risks puzzling and misleading the reader. I do not think that cooke misrepresents Zayn al-Din's overall argument or intention. But both of these strategies may make Zayn al-Din's subsequent withdrawal from the public scene appear more inexplicable than they actually are. When one relies on Zayn al-Din's own writing in all of its fullness (and sometimes its over-expansiveness), her approach appears somewhat more cautious, more carefully set within the mainstream discourse on feminine education and domesticity, for example, than is quite evident from cooke's treatment. Staging a scene of parlor confrontation between Zayn al-Din and her major interlocutor may also give a skewed image of Zayn al-Din's own persona as well as the social environment in which she lived. As a young woman, would she really have confronted the scholar Mustafa al-Ghalayini, many years her senior, in a fierce debate in front of the men in her father's sitting room? (Perhaps, just perhaps, she did do so; but this book does not offer any evidence or indication of it, and it seems highly unlikely.) Indeed, could the young Nazira have marshaled in conversation the quote-laced and often quite lengthy arguments she propounds in her book? Would she have used the same sarcastic and bold mode of address if she had faced al-Ghalayini in person? It hardly seems so. To put these passages into a context of conversational exchange suggests Zayn al-Din had a fearless personality and intrepid social presence, which makes her silent withdrawal from the public scene not long afterward appear truly puzzling.

At the same time, while the juxtaposed segments of text that cooke features give the flavor of Zayn al-Din's polemic, they do not allow for the analysis of the structure, progression and contextualization of her arguments. These excerpts cannot fully communicate the force of these arguments, often conveyed in Zayn al-Din's book through (for example) verses or *ayat* from the Qur'an interspersed within Zayn al-Din's explanations. And as I suggested above, juxtaposing sentences or paragraphs from different sections of *al-Sufur wa'l-Hijab* may give the impression of a sharper and more radical focus than Zayn al-Din's long discourses generally exhibit; her discussions are often carefully set within a fairly conventional framework of critique (see, e.g., the first pages of *al-Fatat wa'l-Shuyukh*). I am also uncomfortable with the fact that at least some passages quoted in translation are more akin to paraphrases, not really conveying the intricacies of the Arabic texts.

The same is true of quotations from Zayn al-Din's second volume (*The Young Woman and the Shaykhs*). For example, the quotation with which cooke opens the book, which celebrates Zayn al-Din's new celebrity status, is actually not as strenuously focused on Zayn al-Din in the longer Arabic version as it is in cooke's abbreviated version (xi), where Zayn al-Din is celebrated as one of several scintillating young women (though, to be fair, the longer original does single her out for notice at the end of the passage). Moreover, this passage appears not on p. 23 of *al-Fatat wa'l-Shuyukh*, as cited by cooke, but on p. 239. A simple typo? Perhaps, but unfortunately this is not the only page reference that is inaccurate or partially accurate. For instance, in cooke's book there appears on page 95 a quotation said to be from pp. 40 and 60-62 of *al-Fatat wa'l-Shuyukh*. The first quoted sentence begins on page 39, followed by one sentence from page 61, then a paraphrase of a paragraph from page 62. Finally there is an interpretation of a sentence on the same page calling 'Easterners' to follow the 'rightly guided path of the West', but without the following paragraph from the original that emphasizes the finality of God's will, an omission which risks giving an inaccurate impression of Zayn al-Din's point.

Nor is there much attempt here to link Zayn al-Din's work and impact (or lack of it) to later gender activism in the region. Cooke uses the rubric "Islamic feminism" (in her title as well as in the book) and invokes in a general way the late-twentieth-century debates over gender politics across the Middle East and amongst Muslim-majority communities, but she lets her characterization of Zayn al-Din's writing, and the excerpts from it, speak for themselves and does not analyze their significance to,

or embeddedness in, earlier and later discourses. She emphasizes the specifically 'Islamic' focus of Zayn al-Din's argument, while offering a brief background treatment of earlier Arab gender activisms without foregrounding the multi-confessional context of those earliest debates and institutional achievements. Mentioning emergent Arabophone women-centred periodicals, she does not address the fact that many were founded by women and men belonging to Arab Christian communities. Perhaps cooke wanted to avoid over-emphasizing religiously defined identity categories. But Zayn al-Din's own work engages constantly with the layered complexity of Arab identities and the impact of cultural flows, and thus some attention to the many roots and branches of emergent Arab feminism would seem appropriate. Moreover, Zayn al-Din was herself a member of a minority community. Curiously, in a book published in a series with the entirely laudable aim of reaching an audience beyond specialized academic circles, cooke does not offer information on the Druze community historically or doctrinally; such background would have helped the reader better evaluate the biography's brief narrative of how this community's political fortunes began to change under the French Mandate over Lebanon in the early 20s and Zayn al-Din's insistence on her Muslim-ness. Nor do we have an analysis of Zayn al-Din's work in comparative focus with other works on women's rights that had already started emerging in print for Arabophone audiences. Cooke is not the first to scrutinize Zayn al-Din's legacy; she cites and briefly mentions, but does not engage critically with, other analyses of Zayn al-Din's intervention by Nabil Bu Matar, Aida al-Jawhari, Elizabeth Thompson, and Nazik Saba Yarid. Margot Badran has also highlighted Zayn al-Din in earlier work, not cited in cooke's study.

But the above are perhaps routes to pursue rather than lacunae: after all, cooke did not set out to offer a comprehensive study of Zayn al-Din's published presence on the 1920s intellectual scene. Her biographical spadework and her book's sparkle offer a fascinating glimpse at this moment in the history of Arab women's public discursive interventions, as cooke also offers signposts for other scholars to follow as they trace this strand of the rich history of gender activisms in Arab societies, which still holds so many surprises.

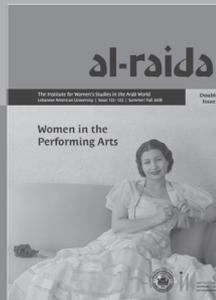
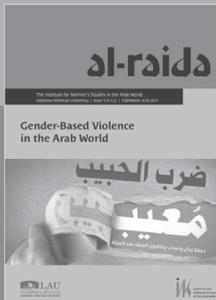
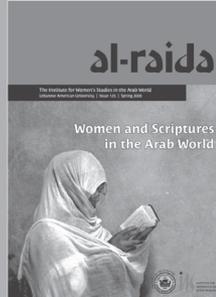
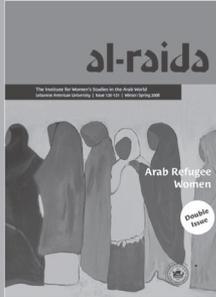
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ENDNOTES

* This is the spelling that cooke adopts when writing her name.

1. Communication from Margot Badran, Jan. 2011; see also Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2009), [essay originally published 2005].

Recent Issues



al-raida

Call for Papers

Non-thematic issue of *Al-Raida*, Summer/Fall 2013

The editorial committee of *Al-Raida* invites submissions for the Summer/Fall 2013 non-thematic issue. *Al-Raida* is an interdisciplinary, double-blind peer-reviewed journal published twice yearly by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU). *Al-Raida* first appeared in May 1976, 3 years after the founding of the first institute for women's studies in the Arab world (IWSAW).

Al-Raida seeks to publish papers on topics across a wide range of academic disciplines that raise women and gender issues in historical and contemporary contexts. *Al-Raida* also seeks to create links across the conventional divides of scholarship and activism; "Western" and "Third World" feminisms; and to be a platform for young scholars and activists based in the Arab world.

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