Margins of the *Mahjar*: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants in Argentina, 1880-1946

Dissertation

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Abstract

This project examines how the Arabic-speaking immigrant community in northwestern Argentina integrated into local society while still preserving ties to their homelands. Emigration from Greater Syria (contemporary Syria and Lebanon, historical Palestine, and parts of Turkey and Iraq) was part of a global process from 1846 to 1940 in which more than 150 million people migrated to the Americas, Southeast and Central Asia, Manchuria and Siberia. Indeed, mass migration of diverse ethnic and religious groups was a signature feature of this near century of movement as 51 million people migrated from Europe (equivalent to twenty percent of its population) to the Americas, as did two million people from Asia and the Levant. After the United States, Argentina was the most popular destination for those heading west and possessed one of the fastest growing economies during the same era. By 1914, the Arabic-speaking immigrant community, comprising more than 100,000 Christians, Jews, and Muslims, became the third largest immigrant group in Argentina, trailing only Italians and Spaniards.

I seek to understand how immigrants survived in a foreign and at times hostile society while maintaining links with the old country. In Argentina, the Arabic-speaking population emerged as an economic powerhouse and a maligned immigrant group. This community became the preeminent ethno-national commercial force in Tucumán, a northwestern province, by 1920, surpassing even Argentine merchants. As this
immigrant group grew in commercial strength, members began to penetrate local Argentine social institutions despite limited avenues to political participation and power. Conversely, men from Greater Syria also had the highest arrest rates of any national group in Tucumán for disorderly conduct, aggravated assault and larceny between 1908 and 1941, suggestive of local prejudice and weak social networks for poorer immigrants. Arabic-speaking women worked as domestic servants, owned shops, formed charity organizations, and raised families passing on cultural heritage. Furthermore, as issues of social class intersected with political transformations in the homeland (Greater Syria), immigrants contested rights of association and leadership in organized immigrant groups in Argentina. My dissertation demonstrates that the composition of the Arabic-speaking community changed over time in response to a whole host of issues, including transnational politics, competing notions of gender and family roles, and economic opportunities and limitations. While some may have run afoul of the law, the community did not break down into religious divisions that might have threatened either their general identities or their connections to their new place of residence. Thus, like Arabic-speaking communities in the United States and elsewhere in the world, immigrants from Greater Syria residing in Argentina experienced years of religious coexistence and cooperation, rather than conflict.
Dedication

Dedicated to Chihiro, Ryuri, and Reina
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Chapter 1: Arabic-speaking Immigrants at the Nexus of Global and Local Processes

The Arabic-speaking community in northwestern Argentina both integrated into local society and preserved ties to their homelands from 1880 to 1946. Only recently have scholars begun detailed studies of these immigrants and their descendents in Latin America and the Caribbean. Even a cursory look uncovers how this community from the Levant successfully participated in politics, achieved economic wealth, and influenced local cultural scenes. First-generation immigrants won elections to municipal councils, mayoralities, provincial and federal legislatures, and governorships throughout northwestern Argentina. Two Maronite Catholic brothers from Deir al-Qamar, a hamlet in southern Mount Lebanon, owned one of the largest beverage factories in Buenos Aires prior to the global depression beginning in 1929. Gibran Traboulsi, a Christian from Tripoli, Beirut province, achieved national fame in Argentina on the stage and on radio under the stage name of Chic Chic Bek during the 1930s and 1940s. While these examples highlight the successes of certain immigrants, my research offers a more holistic presentation of the diverse experiences of those living in Argentina, most of whom arrived before 1930.

The Arabic-speaking communities in Argentina and the Americas maintained distinct types of contact and associations with the homeland. Immigrants also married into local Argentine families, joined elite social clubs, ran afoul of the law, and sued
fellow merchants. Experiences differed based on gender, age and socioeconomic situation. The establishment of an Arabic-language press and the creation of social and mutual aid institutions in Argentina – the course of community organization – reveal a process resulting as much from efforts to be included as acts to exclude others. While these people devised and enacted a variety of strategies to form a collectivity, they still attempted to achieve personal goals and meet family needs. Hence, the conceptualization of an immigrant community and its composition changed over time as a result of both local and transnational events.

More than 150 million people migrated to the Americas, Southeast and Central Asia, Manchuria and Siberia from 1840 to 1940, and emigration from Greater Syria (contemporary Syria and Lebanon, historical Palestine, and parts of Turkey and Iraq) was part of this global process. Indeed, mass migration of diverse ethnic and religious groups was a signature feature of this period. Between 450,000 and 600,000 people emigrated from Greater Syria between 1870 and 1914, accounting for one-sixth of the regional population. Certain areas were particularly heavy sending zones. 100,000 people from Mount Lebanon, equal to one-quarter of the area’s population, lived abroad on the eve of World War I. The corridor north of Damascus running through Kalamoun (Qalamūn) to Homs, Hama and into the Valley of the Christians (Wādī al-Naṣāra) was particularly notable for its diaspora, as was the northern section of the province of Beirut including the coastal cities of Tripoli, Tartus and Latakia.  

Greater Syria is situated at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and formed an important part of the Ottoman Empire’s Arab lands from 1516 to 1920. Located between the Sinai Peninsula in the south and the Taurus Mountains in the north, the territory of Greater Syria stretches eastward from the Mediterranean littoral plain to the Syrian Desert. Within these boundaries lie the Ansariya mountain range in the northwest, the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges in the central zone, and the Carmel and Judean mountains in the south. There are several important rivers that supply much of the water for the agricultural production of the region. The Orontes River originates in the Bekaa Valley, located between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains, and moves northward along the eastern edge of the Ansariya mountains, eventually emptying into the sea near the town of Antakya (Antioch), Turkey. Homs and Hama are important cities positioned on the river’s banks, opening up a fertile plain that reaches to the Euphrates River in the east. The Jordan River originates at Mount Hermon in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains and flows southward, draining into the Dead Sea.²

By the era of global mass migration, Greater Syria consisted of the provinces (vilayets) of Beirut, Syria, and Aleppo and the governorates (mutasarrifiyas) of Mount Lebanon and Jerusalem. Beirut province, established in 1888, was a noncontiguous administrative district consisting of Beirut city and its immediate environs, the northern coastal towns of Latakia, Tartus, Tripoli, and their hinterlands in the Ansariya Mountains, and the southern coastal municipalities of Saida and Haifa, stretching inland to the town of Nablus. Syria province, the largest in dimension and population, extended from the

Hijaz province in the south to Aleppo province in the north and shared a border with Beirut, Jerusalem and Mount Lebanon. Mount Lebanon governorate, formed in 1861, covered the Lebanon mountain range, but had no true port city despite having miles of coastline. The Jerusalem governorate, established in 1873, included the coastal cities of Jaffa and Gaza and bordered the Sinai Peninsula in the south.

The religious diversity of the Arabic-speaking community in Argentina is an important feature. The confessional identities of these immigrants, overwhelmingly from the Beirut and Damascus provinces and the governorates of Mount Lebanon and Jerusalem, included primarily Maronite Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Druze, Sephardic Jews, Sunni Muslims, Shiʿi Muslims, ʿAlawites, and Ismaʿilis. Each Christian community possessed its own churches, clergy, liturgy, and traditions. Of the Arabic-speaking Christians in Argentina, the Maronites and the Greek Orthodox were the most numerous and accounted for the two largest Levantine groups in the Americas.
The Maronite Catholic Church originated in the sixth century, and separated from the Melkites (Greek Catholics) the following century when they began electing their own patriarchs. The sect remained isolated until the eleventh century Crusades, and subsequent contact with the Latin (Roman Catholic) Church intensified over the century. In 1180 CE, leading Maronite clerics met with the Latin Patriarch of Antioch and formally agreed to unite with Rome and adhere to its orthodoxy. The Holy See established a Maronite College in Rome in 1585 to educate future priests in Church orthodoxy and discipline. During the nineteenth century, Maronites in Beirut and Mount Lebanon played prominent roles in the Arabic literary revival (nahḍa) in the Ottoman Arab lands. Many Maronites, lay and clergy alike, also led the charge advocating France’s greater role in Lebanese affairs in the late Ottoman period and after World War I.\(^3\) The Maronite Church, responding to requests from its followers abroad, sent out priests to organize the faithful and provide emotional and spiritual support, establishing a church in Buenos Aires in 1902.

Many Christians from Greater Syria followed the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, also known as the Antiochian Orthodox Church. This Christian branch is an ecclesiastically independent Eastern Orthodox patriarchate whose leader has resided in Damascus since the fourteenth century. The Greek Orthodox comprised the largest

Christian faction in the Beirut and Syria provinces, with the vast majority living in the cities of Beirut, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Tripoli, and their respective hinterlands, including the Valley of the Christians. These areas figured as heavy emigration zones. This community also stood as the second largest Christian group in Mount Lebanon, trailing only the Maronites, and made up the largest one in the Koura (Kūra) district. As early as 1895, a priest from Damascus arrived in New York City to minister to the increasingly large Greek Orthodox community there.⁴

The Islamic community residing in Argentina was an important minority within the Arabic-speaking colony. While there is little censal information regarding the exact numbers of Muslims, the internal diversity is clear based upon the establishment of social organizations. Sunnis, ʿAlawites and Druzes made up the three most prominent branches of Islam represented in Argentina, while there was a recognizable Ismaʿili colony in Berisso, Buenos Aires province by the 1930s. Sunnis, the majority of Muslims in Greater Syria, arrived in Argentina from Cairo, Beirut, and smaller hamlets like Nabk, Damascus district. Sunnis follow the Qurʾan and the hadith (sayings of the prophet Muhammad), which act as a supplement to the divine revelation. The ʿAlawites (Nuṣayriyya) are a branch of Shiʿi Islam located in western Syria in the Ansariya mountain range, but also formed important minorities in the coastal towns such as Latakia. The sect emerged in the ninth century CE as supporters of the tenth Shiʿi imam Ali al-Hadi and created a Gnostic form of worship, venerating Ali ibn Abi Talib, the prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law, “as supreme and eternal god.” By the middle of the eleventh century, followers had settled in the Ansariya Mountains after some time in the city of Aleppo. Prior to the arrival of the Ottomans, the ʿAlawites suffered occasional persecution at the hands of local Sunni rulers and fought intermittently against Ismaʿilis for control of the mountain range. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans largely relied on indirect rule over the ʿAlawites; however, military conflict in 1870 and 1877 led to direct control, including levying taxes and conscripting local males. ʿAlawites accounted for the second-largest Muslim group in Beirut province, numbering eighteen percent of the total population. They also represented the largest religious community in the Latakia district,
the northern most district of Beirut province, amounting to fifty-seven percent of the local inhabitants. The ‘Alawites formed an important minority of the Arabic-speaking colony in Tucumán.5

The Druze community (Durūz) originated in Egypt in the early eleventh century CE and is derived from Ismaʿili Shiʿism. It is a Gnostic sect that initially moved to recognize the Fatimid Caliph Ḥākim as a divine being. With the occultation of Ḥākim and chief theologian Ḥamza in 1021, the Druze followers suffered persecution and dispersed into the Lebanon and Hawran mountain ranges. By the time the Ottomans secured control over Greater Syria, the Druzes had come to dominate political and economic life in the southern portion of Mount Lebanon and the area south of Damascus known as Mount Druze (Jabal Durūz) in the Hawran. Yet, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Maronites began migrating from their stronghold in northern Mount Lebanon to the southern areas. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed Ottoman reforms and increasing European penetration that began to politicize confessional identities in unprecedented ways. The transformation of social relations from one based on secular socioeconomic standing to another founded upon the idea that religious identity became the “authentic basis for political claims” provoked periodic violence, including the massacres of 1860 in which an estimated 15,000 people died and

100,000 were left homeless.⁶ The conflict led to European intervention and an agreement that gave Mount Lebanon greater autonomy within the Ottoman imperial superstructure. The subsequent sixty years marked the longest stretch of internal peace in modern Lebanese history as the Ottoman state established a governorate attached to the Ministry of the Interior that reported directly to Istanbul and committed itself to sustained infrastructure development.⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, the Druze accounted for nearly thirteen percent of the population, and concentrated in the Chouf (Shūf) district in southern Mount Lebanon. The Druzes did not emigrate in the numbers of the Maronites and Greek Orthodox; however, it seems that at least ten percent of its population left Mount Lebanon.⁸ Arabic-speaking Jews from the cities of Aleppo, Damascus and Jerusalem constituted a small, but important, segment of the Syrian colonies in Argentina, as well.

While tensions existed among these communities in Greater Syria and occasioned intermittent violence, the politics of belonging differed overseas. Shared cultural heritage and general geographic provenance intersected with socioeconomic class identities to draw the lines of association. Certainly, immigrants set up religious institutions before secular, broad based organizations emerged, but this should not be seen as definitive


boundaries of fragmentation. Religion mostly served as one loyalty or source of identification among many. The Arabic-speaking colony in Argentina was a diasporic community that got along well enough internally until it did not get along.

Demographic, economic, and cultural transformations dictated the flow of emigration from Greater Syria. Increased birth rates, lowered mortality rates, and an influx of refugees fleeing war-torn areas of the Ottoman Empire provoked an increase in land prices in these areas. Economic stagnation and expensive land limited many economic options for rural folk. The uneven general expansion of the regional economy in the half-century before World War I did create rising expectations and changed patterns of consumption. There was also a profound cultural shift as emigration came to be increasingly understood as an inalienable right and legitimate option to seek financial improvement. In addition, liberal policy measures enacted by the Ottomans and the dispersion of information about the Americas via letters from pioneer emigrants and American and European Christian missionary schools led emigration to become a recognized social practice in the Levant. The Americas were the primary destinations for these travelers, and by 1917, the Arabic-speakers became the third-largest immigrant group in Argentina, behind only the Italians and the Spaniards.

After the United States, Argentina received the largest share of immigrants in the Americas, and possessed one of the fastest growing economies during the same era. Ultimately, more than six million immigrants arrived in Argentina between 1840 and 1932, with three million settling there permanently. Like elsewhere in Latin America, Argentina embraced an export-led model of economic development focusing on agro-pastoral products. The acreage of farmland in use quintupled in the two decades before
World War I. By 1914, Argentina was the world’s largest producer of corn and linseed, second in wool, third in live cattle and horses, and was the third-largest exporter of wheat. That same year, the foreign-born accounted for thirty percent of the national population, and half of the residents in Buenos Aires.⁹

Argentine political culture experienced fundamental changes between 1850 and 1946. Immigrants navigated these modifications, and as a result the study of the Arabic-speaking community allow for a more sensitive understanding of the politics of belonging and an amplified definition of civic participation. Lawmakers from the Argentine interior created an arrangement that wrested power from the province of Buenos Aires by federalizing the city of the same name in 1880, and maintained national control by rigging elections. In this milieu, new state institutions materialized as unfamiliar social actors emerged demanding inclusion in the political system. Social and political elites became alarmed at the spikes in the areas of ‘high sensitivity,’ such as criminality, prostitution, mendicancy and alcoholism.¹⁰

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Novel political parties appeared in the final decade of the nineteenth century determined to reform the political system and address the consequences of rapid economic growth and mass immigration. In 1891, Leandro Alem formed the Unión Cívica Radical, or Radicals, to challenge the closed nature of the political system. The Radicals initially consisted of Catholic groups, factions from the traditional political class, “popular” groups such as merchants and artisans, and university students. The Radical’s commitment to representative democracy was its true innovation. In 1896, Juan B. Justo, originally a member of the Radical Party, established the Socialist Party, and set out to organize and improve the lives of the working class, achieving their greatest success in the federal capital. The Socialists advocated a politics of inclusion by promoting electoral participation and the naturalization of working class foreign nationals, as well as attempting to shape public opinion through the rapidly developing national press. Immigrants represented the majority of the working class in the capital; however, most of them never attained formal Argentine citizenship, and thus never fully integrated into the Socialist Party. In addition to the Radicals and the Socialists, the ideology of anarchism provided a platform for many of these proletarian aliens to proclaim grievances against the Argentine state, not to mention commit acts of violence.11

Calls for reforming the political system after 1890 converged with demands for social reform in response to mass immigration that intensified at the turn of the century. The Argentine state’s concern over labor agitation and the increasing violence of the anarchists led to passage of the Residency Law (*Ley de Residencia*) in 1902, which allowed the state to deport any immigrant deemed to have compromised national security or disturbed the public order. In May 1910, the Argentine Congress passed the Social Defense Law (*Ley de Defensa Social*) in response to the November 1909 assassination of Buenos Aires police chief Ramón Falcón. This law targeted the anarchists, forbidding the right to strike and associate, as well as censoring the leftist press.\(^\text{12}\)

Mass immigration also precipitated an existential crisis as the political and social elites questioned what being an Argentine meant. Nationalist and conservative writers elevated the gaucho, or cowboy, as the national symbol. Other writers, such as the popular novelist Manuel Gálvez, warned against the ills of immigrants who did not integrate into the national body.\(^\text{13}\) These new realities and social actors compelled the Argentine political elite to liberalize electoral politics, leading to the 1912 Sáenz Peña Law that guaranteed universal male suffrage. In the initial election after the reform, the Radical Party won the governorship in Santa Fe province in 1914, and then won the


presidential election two years later with Hipólito Yrigoyen ascending to the presidency. Feminists also demanded reform of women’s legal status via journals and international congresses, achieving a milestone with the 1926 alteration of the civil code that gave single, married and divorced women civil status and rights outside the home. Politics of social control in modern Argentina rested upon the relation of citizenship to the concepts of gender and class, as these policies tended to change over time and affected men and women differently. Gender constructs were shaped by the social, economic, and nationalist structures in the bustling and cosmopolitan port city of Buenos Aires.

Periods of social dislocation and political strife pockmarked the years following electoral reform. In January 1919, right-wing nationalist paramilitaries battled labor unions, sacking the Jewish neighborhoods of Buenos Aires in an anti-Semitic and anti-Labor assault on workers and Jews known as the Tragic Week (*Semana Trágica*). In the 1920s intense social unrest, massive demonstrations, strikes, and violence afflicted the Tucumán countryside. In the wake of national unrest prompted by the global depression,
the Argentine military overthrew Radical President Hipólito Yrigoyen in September 1930. The military returned power to civilian rule in 1932, and a disparate group of political actors, mainly large landowners, disaffected socialists, and Radicals who were enemies of Yrigoyen, coalesced and formed the Concordancia from 1932 to 1943, a period known in the scholarship as the “Infamous Decade” (“década infame”). This coalition stabilized the political system by limiting democratic participation at the national level. The Concordancia’s economic measures, however, failed to prevent the crumbling of the rural economy, provoking large-scale internal migration to the cities. The population of Buenos Aires surged from three and one-half million in 1935 to nearly six million in 1945 as desperate laborers searched for jobs in the factories. Poor working conditions and low wages led to unrest, resulting in a record number of strikes throughout the country in 1942. As disorder continued, the military intervened in 1943, setting the stage for the ascendance of Juan Domingo Perón in 1946.

The northwestern province of Tucumán provides a unique setting to study how these transnational and national processes affected the local society and how an immigrant group correspondingly adjusted to these new realities. Nestled in the eastern foothills of the Andes Mountains, Tucumán is the smallest, yet most densely populated, province. With the extension of the rail line connecting Tucumán to Buenos Aires in 1876, the sugar industry blossomed and became the engine of the regional economy. The importance of this single commodity posed unique challenges to the federal state as it sought to arbitrate the conflicting demands of sugar industrialists, cane farmers, and field
Like elsewhere in Argentina, the Radical Party came to power in the first elections following the 1912 Saenz-Peña Law; however, the federal Radical government deposed two fellow governors because of local politics in the 1920s.

Map 1.4. Province of Tucumán, its Administrative Units, and Railroad Lines, 1895. Source: Adapted from Patricia Juárez-Dappe, *When Sugar Ruled*, 27.

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The largest group of immigrants from Greater Syria, as a percentage of the local population, resided in Tucumán. Within the province, half of them settled in the capital and another one-third resided in the important sugar zones, principally Cruz Alta, Chicligasta, Famaillá, Monteros, and Río Chico departments. Many worked as peddlers, shopkeepers, and farmhands. Two surprising and contradictory statistics emerged about this colony. Arabic-speaking merchants became the wealthiest national commercial group in 1920, surpassing even native-born Argentine merchants. However, these sojourners also possessed the highest rates of arrest for disorderly conduct, larceny and aggravated assault of any immigrant group in Tucumán between 1905 and 1941. The diversity and complexity of this colony, as well as the multiplicity of experiences, led to questions among immigrants about who could and could not associate as a member of the Arabic-speaking community. These debates are a central concern of this study.

Organizational and Theoretical Frameworks of the Study:

As emigration became a compelling life choice and ingrained social practice among people from Greater Syria, a new physical destination and imagined understanding of it manifested both in the writings of cultural elites and in various forms of popular culture. Migration into the mahjar, the land of emigration, offered immigrants

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an opportunity to improve their financial and social lot. The mahjar was at once a particular locale and a shared imagined space that connected Arabic-speakers in Tucumán with their peers, friends and families back home and throughout the world. With the help of a budding immigrant press in the Americas, socio-economic advancement increasingly shaped the expectations of these people and their responsibilities to the old country, to their host societies and to the immigrant colony at large. In contrast to Benedict Anderson’s focus on the nation and its territoriality, print capitalism, for those in the mahjar, became the driving force for creating a shared sense of connectivity across continents, articulating a set of behavioral norms, and disseminating nationalistic ideologies during World War I.¹⁸

The mahjar, as both a physical location and an imagined space of shared experiences, allows for the inclusion of a broad range of people who left the eastern Mediterranean and who have been divided arbitrarily by scholars of Latin America. Emigration to Argentina mirrored the confessional and regional diversity of Greater Syria: Arabic-speaking Christians, Jews and Muslims had all left from Damascus, Beirut, Homs, Hama and Aleppo and their hinterlands and had all settled in Buenos Aires, Tucumán and other provinces and territories by 1914.¹⁹ Migrants from Greater Syria developed the mahjar by utilizing new technologies, such as the international


standardized mail service and wire transfers, and establishing press organs and social institutions in the new societies. They corresponded with friends and family back home and in the mahjar to communicate news and information. Men and women abroad remitted large sums of money to their families to help offset local economic problems or to help advance family holdings. The publishers of Arabic-language periodicals in the Americas advocated the Arabic language and shared geographic origin as the key unifiers for this group of people. Immigrants also formed village-based associations with branches throughout the Americas to maintain ties as well as raise funds for school construction. Finally, Arabic-speaking immigrants established institutions to organize the community and create a space of sociability. Hence, Armenians from Beirut, Jews from Aleppo and Jerusalem, Maronite Catholics and Druzes from Mount Lebanon, Orthodox Christians from Homs, and ʿAlawite Muslims from Latakia, Syria all viewed themselves as part of a larger immigrant community at particular moments. Yet the diversity and complexity of this group interacted with events, both local and national, to create a consistent tension concerning the make-up of this community.

With the mahjar as the key organizational tool, this study utilizes an intersectional approach to evaluate how political and economic processes and social and cultural categories interacted and shaped the spaces within which actors operated. Scholars initially used intersectionality to show how race and gender together reproduced the subordination of women of color in the United States, including immigrant women. This critique challenged the designation of race and gender as variables essentially independent of each other, claiming rather that only by appreciating how these categories worked in conjunction with one another could a better understanding of domination and
subordination be assessed and confronted. Including other variables, such as age, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, skill sets, education levels, socioeconomic class, legal codes, state and social institutions, transnational ideologies, and the ebbs and flows of global and local economies, expands more fully the terrain upon which people pursued meaningful lives. The intersections of these categories, institutions and processes had material consequences for Arabic-speaking immigrants in northwestern Argentina.

Scholars struggle to define this immigrant community as the categories and units of analysis have stressed a poorly articulated ethnicity, including Arabs, Arabic-speakers, Syrians, Lebanese, Syro-Lebanese, Armenians, and Jews. Each of these groups identified and associated at various moments with this immigrant community. Local society and Argentine officials in Tucumán alternated between “colonia siria,” “turcos,” “árabes,” and “sirios,” until the 1914 census standardized the use of Ottoman for their political identity. Internally, the community referred to themselves in Arabic as jāliyya suriyya and jāliyya ʿuthmāniyya, which translates as “Syrian colony” and “Ottoman colony,” respectively. In Spanish, they used “colonia siria,” “colectividad siria,” and “colectividad sirio-ottomana.” Simply dividing these immigrants into Syrians and Lebanese obscures the intense political transformations in the old country that had direct consequences for the colony. Moreover, the terms Lebanese, Syrian and Syro-Lebanese


essentialize these identities into seemingly self-evident axioms, conflating nationality with ethnicity and obscuring internal dynamics and diversity.\textsuperscript{22}

Ignacio Klich and Jeffrey Lesser suggest it is more fruitful to study immigrants from a perspective based upon ethnicity. Indeed, the Argentine elite conflated race and ethnicity with national identity. This simplification led to sweeping generalizations in the historical and sociological literature covering Argentina. The simplifications also represent a powerful limitation of immigration studies in general. Nonetheless, Klich and Lesser did not advance the use of ethnicity as a lens when they declared “the Latin American penchant to oversimplify… was initially applied to Arabs, Armenians and Jews with documents issued by the Ottoman authorities.”\textsuperscript{23} Separation along these three categories is equally simplistic and sweeping. Ethnicity remains a highly debated concept that fundamentally refers to relationships and contacts between groups of people.\textsuperscript{24} For ethnicity to materialize, groups of people must have a “minimum amount of contact” between each other and think about “ideas of each other as being culturally


\textsuperscript{23} Klich and Lesser, \textit{Arab and Jewish Immigrants}, 4.

different from themselves.”²⁵ It is, therefore, a feature of a relationship, and not an innate or primordial quality of a certain group of people. Ethnic groups rely on culture – the symbolic stuff that gives meaning to people’s lives such as language and religion – to help create boundaries with those deemed different. People utilize symbols that evoke a certain meaning with which many from the group identify, fostering an authentic and shared cultural heritage.

While ethnic identities are certainly lived by actors, the role of the observers and the ascription of ethnicity cannot be overlooked. As Marcus Banks concluded, ethnicity is “a collection of rather simplistic and obvious statements about boundaries, otherness, goals and achievements, being and identity, descent and classification that has been constructed as much by the anthropologist as by the subject.”²⁶ Peter Wade maintains that ethnicity refers to cultural difference, using a “language of place”, yet critiques the excessive focus on discourse and representation, contending, “economics and political and social life in general are lived through the medium of culture.”²⁷ Moreover, Wade argues for historicizing the term in studies of groups of people. However, in the contemporary world, the idea of ethnicity is “indissolubly linked to nationalism and race, to ideas about normative political systems and relations, and to ideas about descent and blood.”²⁸ These links influence most of the studies of the Arabic-speaking community in

²⁵ Eriksen, Ethnicity and Nationalism, 12.

²⁶ Banks, Ethnicity, 190.

²⁷ Peter Wade, Race and Ethnicity in Latin America (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 18, 112.

²⁸ Banks, Ethnicity, 189.
Argentina, and shut out the fluidity and amorphous nature of cultural symbols and how internal and external processes transformed them.

In the case of Arabic-speaking immigrants, ethnic identities would become increasingly associated with nationalist movements. Nationalism, the politicization of ethnic identity, shaped culture because “ethnic, linguistic, and racial differences, hitherto politically inconsequential, [acquired] an ideological force and institutional weight.”

The idea of national culture had an integrative potential where, in many cases, elites embraced a shared identity and past with non-elites for the first time. Yet, when nationalists appropriated symbols and attached a nationalist discourse to them, their meanings changed.

Before World War I, émigrés, especially those who published newspapers, formulated a Syrian identity as the hegemonic Arabic-speaking immigrant identity in Argentina and the rest of the Americas. At the same time, this ethnicization – the creation of a Syrian identity in opposition to other groups – took place in dialogue with intellectuals based in Beirut, Cairo, and Damascus.


32 The concept of ethnicization has been a staple of studies on immigrant communities in the US; however, little of the scholarship examines how these groups fashioned identities in relation with those in the homeland. See, for instance, Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta and Rudolph J.
In the critical years after 1908, Levantine newspapers disseminated competing nationalist ideas to readers, including those in the mahjar, and animated the Arabic press in Argentina and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{33} Intellectuals from the Syrian colony in Argentina participated by forming organizations and published newspapers promoting a variety of political loyalties that changed over time as their homelands underwent intense political transformations during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Far from viewing the Ottoman state as oppressive, Syrian immigrants in Argentina attempted to secure diplomatic relations between Istanbul and Buenos Aires, culminating in the consular protocol of 1910. In the wake of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, the Syrian colony organized large-scale festivities and private parties across Argentina celebrating the return of democratic governance and embracing an Ottoman identity.

World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire provoked a dilemma for their mutual political identity as their shared sense of place and association dissolved. This existential crisis forced immigrants to grapple with the question whether or not a Syrian community existed at all. In this space, nationalist ideologies politicized ethno-regional identities in new ways and led to a novel racialized political identity: a fellowship founded on the Arab race. These ideologies created new fault lines within the Syrian colony in Argentina, principally among the politically active cultural elite. As the drama in the homelands played out, a new local, elite-led Syrian-Lebanese immigrant identity

emerged in the early 1920s that attempted to mitigate the divisiveness caused by the politics of the homeland and to act as the voice of the community. Hence, Arabic-speaking immigrant identities were subject to a variety of ideologies and processes that intersected at particular historical moments. The conceptual utility of the mahjar and intersectionality allows for a more holistic assessment of how identities were formed and refashioned – changes that had a direct influence on the composition of the colony.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Review of Literature:}

The study of immigrants in Latin America has been one of the most productive and consequential fields for examining the transformation of local societies and the impact these newcomers had on social, cultural, political and economic life. Three early works influenced the study of immigrants and their effect on local society. In \textit{Labor, Nationalism and Politics in Argentina}, Sam Baily asserts competing nationalisms emerged between mobilized workers who were European immigrants and those who were internal Argentine migrants. The liberal nationalism of European workers insisted on free trade and social welfare programs to safeguard the working class. Mobilized internal migrants constructed a Creole nationalism that celebrated the Hispanic traditions

\textsuperscript{34} Benedict Anderson notes how contemporary migrants, who benefit from modern technologies like e-mail, participate in a deterritorialized form of nationalism that is “without responsibility or accountability,” supporting, cajoling, and advocating for a certain political outcome with impunity. Arabic-speaking immigrants also practiced this so-called long-distance nationalism during the first-half of the century; however, the context and goals of the participation changed over the course of the period under study. Benedict Anderson, \textit{Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics} (Amsterdam: CASA, 1992), 11.
of Argentina and envisioned a classless society. It was the latter, argues Baily, to which President Juan Domingo Perón attached himself during his reign.35

A second early contribution to the study of immigrants is Carl Solberg’s *Immigration and Nationalism, Argentina and Chile, 1890-1914*, which examines how Argentine and Chilean political and cultural elites viewed the newly arrived.36 For the author, the mass influx of largely European peoples provoked a rising nationalism that attacked immigrants for the ills of urban blights and labor unrest. These prejudicial discourses floated among local, social, and political elites, circulated throughout the press, and shaded how scholars perceived state institutions interacted with immigrants. Yet, the emphasis on the discourse produced by cultural and political elites did not adequately address how immigrants utilized state institutions or entered certain prestigious social institutions.

Guy Bourdé’s *Urbanisation et Immigration en Amérique Latine, Buenos Aires, XIXe et XXe Siècles* examines the growth of Buenos Aires as a result of massive immigration. Bourdé studied how this Latin American city grew in population without the benefit of industrialization, blending Argentine census data with sources from European archives, including a few travel memoirs, and secondary sources. He demonstrates that mass immigration and the economic importance of the port directly influenced the intense urbanization of the city of Buenos Aires over the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet, Bourdé, overemphasizing the pull factors, asserts “the offer


36 Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*. 
of employment from the host country directly determined the flow of immigrants.” He aligns the flow with Argentine infrastructure expansion; however, Bourdé does not follow the trail outside Buenos Aires nor does he recognize the socio-economic situation in the home countries. The author further suggests these immigrants tended to live in closed communities, allowing for a perpetuation of cultural life distinct from Argentine culture. Bourdé’s reliance on quantitative data limits the closer inspection of these immigrant groups and the various strategies enacted to engage local society and state institutions, to enter labor markets, and to pursue personal and familial goals. These three early works demonstrate how scholars linked immigrants to questions regarding labor movements, social policy, cultural concerns and the development of Latin American cities. Each study is limited in certain ways and ignores the role of immigrant women, the agency of immigrants in the face of prejudicial discourses, and the internal debates within these communities.

While many of the initial studies on immigration to the Americas, like Bourdé, rely upon statistical data culled from various state offices and national censuses, a paradigm shift began to emerge with the publication of Samuel Baily and Franco Ramella’s One Family, Two Worlds: An Italian Family’s Correspondence across the Atlantic, 1901-1922 in 1988. This book is a collection of letters between immigrant brothers Oreste and Abele Sola and their parents Luigi and Margherita, who remained in Italy. The brothers migrated to Argentina before World War I and maintained written correspondence with their family in the old country. For the editors, this trove of

documents provides a unique perspective on the personal, or “subjective,” experience of migration. Furthermore, the letters show “informal personal networks provided the basis for social organization of the migration process and influenced nearly every phase of it: the decision to migrate, the choice of destination, where to live and work, changes of residence and occupation, social life, and the choice of marriage partner.”

In their introduction, the editors assess the risks and rewards for using these types of sources, such as veracity and perspective, and argue for the use of these materials when writing about the migration experience. Interestingly, the editors decided to elide all references to Italian politics from these letters, believing this information was of “secondary interest” to scholars.

Following the general cultural turn in Latin American historiography in the 1990s, scholars of immigration focused on the central issues of adaptation and integration, the construction and maintenance of an organized community, and the relationship between immigrants and the host society. Samuel Baily’s *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise*, a

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comparative analysis of Italians in New York City and Buenos Aires, demonstrates how immigrants’ skill sets combined with local realities to condition adjustment and assimilation. Italians in New York, a smaller portion of the local population, did not constitute a large share of any particular area of the labor force, and were more likely to earn money and return home. Italians remained longer in Buenos Aires than in New York because this immigrant community represented a greater proportion of the local immigrant population and adjusted to local cultural norms and language more easily. Hence, Italians developed strong social networks, came to dominate certain sectors of the Buenos Aires economy, such as industry and construction, gained access to more resources, and generally prospered.

José Moya’s *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* reveals how the global intersected with the local to shape the migration of people from Spain to Buenos Aires. In particular, Moya looks at two distinct processes, namely emigration and adaptation. The author eschews the “push-pull” dichotomy and advocates the cumulative effect of five global revolutions, namely demographic, agricultural, liberal, transportation and technological, to explain mass emigration from Europe. Moya combines the 1920s Chicago school of ethnic-urban studies, which focused on the ghetto and subsequent decentralization and outward movement, with the concept of chain migration to create “the theoretical possibility of integrating urban ecology and immigrant networks, socioeconomic class and ethnic culture, macro-

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42 Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*. 
structural and micro-social variables” in the discussion of adaptation.\textsuperscript{43} Put another way, the social network of an immigrant’s home village or kin group that had preceded him or her to the New World met with a person upon arrival in Buenos Aires. Moya utilizes quantitative and qualitative sources to examine the life course of a migrant from their home village to their arrival in Buenos Aires. These sources include Spanish and Argentine census manuscripts and returns, the police blotter, newspapers, cultural associations’ meeting minutes, and oral histories.

Global processes intersected with local particularities to shape the migration of people to the Americas, “creating a tangle of small local flows between certain European areas and Latin American regions of arrival.”\textsuperscript{44} An immigrant’s interpersonal social network of his hometown and extended family influenced destination choice, conditioned the rate of adjustment and adaptation, and helped new arrivals to secure housing and employment. Once in the host society, immigrants fashioned informal social webs and formal institutions to recreate a sense of community and to defend and pursue aims and interests. The emergence of mutual aid societies and an immigrant press was crucial to these processes, in addition to consolidating a social hierarchy among immigrants.\textsuperscript{45} Moya’s illustration of institutional life among immigrants in Buenos Aires and its role in organizing the Spanish colony to articulate, defend and achieve its goals are signature

\textsuperscript{43} Moya, \textit{Cousins and Strangers}, 126.


contributions. He also argues more specific regional institutions were primarily used for camaraderie, whereas the larger “Spanish” institutions provided social benefits and acted as a bulwark to protect against competing immigrant groups. Class identities, regional loyalties and politicized ethnic and cultural identities could threaten the cohesiveness of a larger Spanish community.46 “The development of an immigrant associational structure probably delayed Argentinization by providing services that made the community more self-sufficient.”47 At the very least, these formal immigrant institutions helped to engage the host population and defend against prejudices and stereotypes manifesting from societies in the midst of profound change.

Ronald C. Newton’s *German Buenos Aires, 1900-1933: Social Change and Cultural Crisis* is an important study of an immigrant community, its internal evolution, and its daily interaction with the larger society.48 Newton, prefiguring the work of Baily and Ramella, utilized German-language newspapers, commercial address books, archival materials and collections from the voluntary associations to illustrate a complex German community. He documented the impressive success of the German merchant class and indicated the overrepresentation of Germans in certain influential places, such as the military, professoriate and business. Yet, the cohesiveness of this immigrant colony, once joined by a shared cultural identity, was undermined by distinct divisions of labor imbued with ideas of class, a depressed labor market, and the fallout from the Treaty of Versailles and its war guilt clauses. Newton argues the divisiveness of these issues

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46 Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 318-327.


48 Newton, *German Buenos Aires*. 

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reached a crescendo in the 1920s as competing groups vied for control of institutional life following the collapse of imperial Germany, ultimately eroding the bonds of the colony and setting the stage for the takeover by sympathizers of the Nazis.49

The scholarship on Arabic-speaking immigrants has mirrored generally the concerns of researchers studying the European flow. Scholars, however, have emphasized the prejudicial perceptions held by local society, and how, in spite of this perceived intolerance, this immigrant group successfully integrated into local society.50

In spite of this concern with overcoming social and institutional prejudice, some scholars focus on the question of immigrant identity formation. Christina Civantos’ *Between Argentina and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* investigates Argentine intellectuals’ perceptions of the Islamic world and how this allowed them to formulate a national identity.51 For instance, Domingo Sarmiento in his canonical *Facundo, o, Civilización y barbarie* (1845) created the barbaric gaucho-bedouin to indict the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas and attack the backwardness (*atraso*) of the countryside’s inhabitants. In *El Payador* (1916), Leopoldo Lugones revisited the gaucho to assess how the Moorish ancestry of the gaucho influenced his


customs and characteristics to create a unique national figure in the era of mass migration. At the same time, a variety of Arabic-speaking writers resident in Argentina, such as former Ottoman Consul Emin Arslan, also tapped this Orientalist discourse to create a distinctive place of belonging within the host society. Finally, Civantos investigated the preoccupations of Arabic-speaking authors regarding language, including a novel written in the Levantine dialect that attempted to create a set of behavioral norms.\textsuperscript{52} For the author, the use of dialect suggests there was no uniform language for these immigrants from Greater Syria, and thus no singular immigrant identity. Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, in \textit{So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico}, scrutinizes how a small number of Arabic-speaking immigrants integrated into Mexican society by carefully cultivating the identity of a foreign citizen, or the notion an immigrant could maintain multiple identities while forming a part of the Mexican nation.\textsuperscript{53} Yet, neither Civantos nor Alfaro-Velcamp provides a detailed description of the immigrant community. In addition, the authors do not show how the community actually organized itself or how it functioned internally and externally. More recently, scholars have begun to examine the ways in which the linkages with homeland politics affected immigrants in the United States and how return migrants influenced the development of the homeland.\textsuperscript{54}

This study contributes to scholarship on immigrants in Argentina and the Arabic-speaking communities in the Americas by examining how transnational processes affected immigrants and their identities while attempting to situate this story within its

\textsuperscript{52} Civantos, \textit{Between Argentines and Arab}, 31-60, 79-110, 202-211

\textsuperscript{53} Alfaro-Velcamp, \textit{So Far from Allah}, 21-23, 111, 132.

\textsuperscript{54} Gualtieri, \textit{Between Arab and White}; Khater, \textit{Inventing Home}.
larger global context. In addition, this examination pursues themes raised by Samuel Baily, namely issues of race and discrimination, including the reasons for nativism, how immigrants interacted with internal migrants and minority communities, and immigrant participation in host society politics. The bulk of works examining immigrants in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America focus on Europeans and enrich our understanding of their important roles in labor issues, national politics, and the politics of belonging. This emphasis, however, led scholars to neglect the influential role the Arabic-speaking communities played in the formation of modern Argentina as well as their homelands, and how concerns with both affected the development and maintenance of an organized immigrant colony. Yet, the effort by scholars of Arabic-speaking immigration to show the successful integration by a supposedly unwanted immigrant group has come at the expense of the internal discussions, debates and political considerations that influenced the shape of the community. As a result, a fuller picture of this immigrant group and how homeland politics and local considerations intersected remains unstudied. Finally, this thesis builds upon an observation by Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein critiquing the monolithic presentation of immigrant communities and ethnic groups. They note, “examining ethnic groups *grosso modo* ignores intra ethnic divisions that are often replicated over many generations.” To this end, my research highlights the intersection of the local and the global, and how Arabic-speaking immigrants


implemented a variety of strategies to better integrate into Argentine society while maintaining relationships with the old country.

**Chapters Summaries:**

This inquiry follows the Arabic-speaking community in northwestern Argentina diachronically, studying a set of themes that had a direct impact on the opportunities and limitations these people faced. Chapter 2 examines both causes for emigration and the initial years of settlement in Argentina until the eve of World War I, moving from the Greater Syria to Buenos Aires and finally to Tucumán, in northwestern Argentina. The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 provides a distinct divide for two phases of emigration. The earlier phase featured a group of immigrants that possessed better skill sets, arrived with more capital and were considerably smaller in number than those who arrived after 1908. Those arriving in the second phase swelled the ranks of the urban working class and, in the case of Tucumán, overwhelmed micro-social networks designed to facilitate adaptation and integration. As a result, a socioeconomic class structure formed and solidified within the community that had direct consequences on options available to immigrants in moments of crisis.

Chapter 3 focuses on the consequences of political transformations in the homeland and the economic turmoil in Argentina from 1914 to 1922 on Arabic-speaking immigrants. For those politically-committed to the old country, the evolution of World War I, the emergence of competing nationalisms, such as Arab and Lebanese, and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire provoked deep schisms within the collectivity. The competition and strife in the homeland were so intense that a movement in Tucumán emerged focusing on a politics of Arab culture emerged. Yet for many more immigrants
problems in the homeland were a mere backdrop to their struggle to survive the deteriorating economic conditions and harsh labor markets of wartime and post-war Argentina. Those less economically secure Arabic-speakers enacted a series of strategies to survive the recession experienced in northwestern Argentina, such as increasingly marrying into local Argentine families. In addition, many Arabic-speakers searched for work in the sugar cane fields of the Argentine Northwest. This desperate search for work led several hundred Syrian immigrants in Tucumán to sign contracts to cut cane on a plantation in nearby Jujuy province in 1916. The dubious nature of compensation provoked the largest labor rebellion heretofore in that province.

Chapter 4 explores the role of the family as a vital institution that offered protection against interpersonal violence. A key feature of the Syrian-Lebanese colony in Tucumán was its inability to establish enduring social aid institutions that went beyond confessional identities. As a result, immigrants relied on interpersonal networks and Argentine state institutions to defend themselves and seek redress to grievances. In addition, the chapter follows the story of how the French colonial states of Lebanon and Syria prompted the establishment of the Syrian-Lebanese Society in 1925, an institution designed as a broad-based cultural organization eschewing the divisive homeland politics. Not intended to be a mutual aid association, the Society quickly became a space of sociability for the merchant class of the Syrian-Lebanese colony. At the same time, local politics as well as issues in the homeland created tense moments within the colony as particular immigrants jockeyed to speak on behalf of the larger Syrian-Lebanese colony in Tucumán.

Chapter 5 investigates how socioeconomic status played an important role in
determining what options immigrants could pursue. Non-elite women, either a Syrian or married to one, enacted strategies to survive disastrous interpersonal relationships and the economic malaise afflicting Tucumán during the 1930s. While these immigrants struggled, the colony’s well-to-do seized opportunities to better integrate into local society. As the colony’s merchants achieved and maintained their wealthy status, many Syrians and Lebanese called for participation in the local political parties and elections. Electoral success came in the latter part of the decade; however, elite women of the colony carried out the greatest intervention into local politics during the global depression, creating a space of belonging in which they were sought after by provincial politicians and exclusive Argentine women’s organizations for their advice, expertise, and affiliation.

Finally, Chapter 6 examines the efforts by Arabic-speaking immigrants and their children to fully integrate into local society in the 1930s and 1940s, despite the completion of the colony’s fragmentation. By the late 1930s, many of the pioneer generation of Arabic-speaking immigrants were giving way to their children, many of whom took over family businesses and graduated from Argentine universities. Both first- and second-generation immigrants successfully penetrated local political institutions and won seats to elected office at the provincial and federal levels by the early 1940s. In addition to this decisive transition to local electoral success, a final surge of nationalistic political mobilization materialized in the early 1940s with the arrival and efforts of Antun Saadeh, the provocative leader of the Syrian nationalist movement. Yet, by the close of the study, the efforts of Saadeh had disintegrated as rapidly as they had appeared, and the relationship to the old country began to shift in meaning as the pioneer generation died
Discussion of Sources:

To write this work, I accessed a variety of source materials in Argentine, Lebanese, Syrian, and North American repositories. In calculating the quantitative data, I tapped national and municipal censuses. The 1913 census of San Miguel de Tucumán is a valuable source for assessing the Arabic-speaking colony in a variety of areas, such as vocation, labor market participation, literacy, and spatial location. The Anuarios de estadística de la provincia de Tucumán were essential for detailing the evolution of the Arabic-speaking colony. These annual reports provide statistics on marriage, participation in local cultural institutions, medical afflictions, criminality, commercial and industrial wealth, and agricultural production over the course of fifty years. I combined them with population data to determine rates of exogamous marriage and arrest, and averages of wealth within the immigrant colony.

Qualitative materials, such as court proceedings, merchant registries, and Spanish and Arabic language newspapers, are a critical source for adding texture to the statistical findings. The court records illustrate an important contact point between the state, local society and Arabic-speaking immigrants. Numerous members of this colony were merchants, many of whom sued and were sued. Economic activity comes alive in the proceedings. The court accounts further demonstrate how immigrants and their children both perpetrated and suffered from criminal activity, and either sought redress or bore punishment. The merchant registries show the various small shops and enterprises immigrants established as well as their location. This data allows for the tracking of a
diverse set of options immigrants pursued to better their lot as well as their spatial location.

Newspapers described the experiences of these immigrants, ranging from the mundane to the sensational. Spanish language periodicals provide a window into the views of the local population on a variety of issues, including mass immigration. Arabic-language newspapers published in Argentina are crucial to this study. These publications, usually in Arabic, possessed particular political orientations, competed against other publications to claim the mantle of community spokesperson, and were ephemeral.\(^57\) Periodicals presented news about the homeland, usually in the form of letters from correspondents, information received from recent arrivals, and letters from family members. Most were only four pages in length, but provided news about immigrants in Argentina and the issues faced, successes achieved and tragedies suffered, reflecting “faithfully the life, aspirations and values of the Arab community” in Argentina.\(^58\) The Arabic press also effusively praised the generosity of Argentines, marveled at the country’s wealth, and celebrated the freedoms experienced there by immigrants.\(^59\) Hence, Arabic-language newspapers published in the mahjar are invaluable sources for assessing the state of immigrant community life, the affairs

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\(^{57}\) There were notable exceptions, such as al-Salām (1902-1973), Ṣada al-Sharq (1917-1952), Diario Siriolibanés (1929-1960), and al-Mursal (1913-1940). Ṣada al-Sharq was the first newspaper to be fully bilingual in Arabic and Spanish. See Abdelouahed Akmir, “La prensa árabe en Argentina,” Huellas comunes y miradas cruzadas: mundos árabe, ibérico e iberoamericano (Rabat, Morocco: University Mohamed V, 1995), 291-305.


\(^{59}\) Ibid.
circulating within it, the competing concerns regarding the politics of the homeland, and what the intellectuals believed the responsibilities of immigrants were to the host society.

**Transliteration**

I have utilized the IJMES (International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies) Transliteration Chart for Arabic and Ottoman words and the IJMES Word List for commonly used Arabic terms. I have employed the Spanish transliteration of Arabic-speaking peoples’ names because this is how they appear in the press and court records. For instance, Nagib Baaclini is used instead of Najīb Ba’qīnī.
Chapter 2: The Syrian Colony in the Argentine Mahjar, 1890-1914

Introduction

Argentina received nearly five million immigrants in the half-century before World War I, more than half of whom stayed permanently. Technological advances in transportation and the uneven integration of the sending countries into the world economy provoked in part this movement of people. ¹ Christian, Jewish and Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire joined in this mass migration and journeyed to the Americas. Pioneering emigrants from towns and hamlets of Greater Syria like Homs and Zahla ventured into the mahjar, many permanently, and served as the nodal points for the chain migration of friends and family from the homeland. In addition, a budding Arabic-language press in the Americas, coupled with personal correspondence, disseminated information about lands of opportunity, such as Argentina, the United States, and Brazil. As a result, nearly 100,000 Arabic-speaking immigrants from Greater Syria settled in Argentina by 1917. ²

¹ Moya, Cousins and Strangers, 45-59.

² For an example of the importance of correspondence for maintaining contact with and encouraging emigration from the homeland before World War I, see Archivo General de la Provincia de Tucumán (hereafter AGPT), Box 4506, Folder 10, Series E, “María Argentina Getar to Judge,” Sucesión de Antonio Getar, October 1, 1953.
While the majority of the Syrian colony settled in the federal capital and the province of Buenos Aires, a steady stream took the railroad to the northern Argentine provinces. Of these, the greatest number settled in the province of Tucumán. As the center of the northwestern provinces and the engine of the regional economy, Tucumán emerged as an attractive place to practice commerce, initially as itinerant peddlers. Many of these pioneer immigrants later established stores, servicing the company towns and employees that worked in the sugar industry, the lifeblood of northwestern Argentina. Once established, the pioneers existed as a social network that influenced the formation of the Syrian colony in Tucumán. For instance, villagers from El Mrouj, located in the central Matn district of Mount Lebanon, leased and bought land in the Cruz Alta district of Tucumán and grew sugar cane, whereas inhabitants from Bazoun, located in Batrūn district northern Mount Lebanon, opened shops along Maipú and Mendoza streets in San Miguel de Tucumán. Hence, early Arabic-speaking immigrants generally arrived with some capital and were also able to use interpersonal ties to friends, family members, co-religionists, or wealthy immigrants established in Buenos Aires to procure merchandise on consignment.

Later, immigrants arrived and fitted into these already-existing networks in Tucumán that eased their social adaptation and facilitated their economic participation. Comprised of associations of individuals connected by village or kinship ties, economic arrangements, and/or shared religious identities, these informal links helped immigrants

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3 Arabic-speaking immigrants referred to themselves, both in Arabic and Spanish, as the *colonia siria* (Syrian colony) and *colonia sirioottomana* (Syro-Ottoman colony) through the initial years of World War I.
acquire basic needs, such as finding a bride, arbitrating internal conflict, establishing behavioral norms among the immigrants, and procuring food, housing, and employment.\textsuperscript{4} Commerce and contracts also caused disputes and, as a result, immigrants used state institutions such as the legal system to seek redress. The use of such institutions demonstrated the limits of social networks in resolving internal discord. It also illustrated certain flexibility within these associations, which permitted immigrants to reach outside networks while not severing ties from these connections entirely.

These networks and the information about the job market that circulated through them were “greatly influenced by both social and spatial segregation, which in turn serve[d] to reinforce occupational segregation in a mutually constitutive process.”\textsuperscript{5} Those in the Tucumán mahjar, however, who arrived with weaker or nonexistent social networks faced greater hurdles achieving upward social mobility and were subject to intense social dislocation during turbulent economic times with fewer options to ameliorate the situation. In particular instances, the Argentine state intervened in the lives of those immigrants whose social networks could not effectively deal with a specific crisis, such as severe illness.

The emergence and development of a sizable Syrian colony in northwestern Argentina was characterized by politics of the homeland, intra-communal relationships,

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{4}] I am influenced by Diane Singerman’s work on the informal networks in the popular sectors of Cairo. See Diane Singerman, \textit{Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 132-172.
\end{itemize}
and interaction with local society. The pioneering immigrants who settled in northwestern Argentina grappled with a variety of issues and insecurities as they integrated into the local social and economic milieu and attempted to organize their community. Affinity for and identification with the Ottoman Empire provided a shared political identity and point of union for many sectors of this immigrant group. The evolution of the Syrian colony in Tucumán, however, was marked by intense internal power struggles among the elite immigrants and distinct class formation.

The Spanish and Italian immigrant communities in Tucumán dwarfed the Syrian colony in 1895, and had already established social aid and community institutions. As Chart 2.1 indicates, the Ottoman community, which overwhelmingly consisted of Arabic-speakers, had swelled by the outbreak of World War I, Furthermore, it had become a recognized commercial force despite being still only a quarter of the size of the Spanish colony and half the size of the Italians. Unlike the Spanish and Italians in Tucumán, the Syrian colony never organized itself before 1914 by establishing broad-based social aid and cultural institutions.

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6 “Los árabes en la República,” La Prensa, November 17, 1906.
Micro-social networks influenced Syrian participation in the local economy, but had limited capabilities in times of socioeconomic distress and could provide little aid in the face of massive immigration. Arabic-speakers concentrated in the commercial sector of the economy, working mainly as shopkeepers and peddlers. Among those Syrians attracted to agriculture, there were also sugar cane cultivators (cañeros) who bought and leased land and produced cane for the local sugar factories. The absence of social aid institutions during these early years, however, meant the most vulnerable Syrians
suffered during the swings of the regional economy, especially during the period of
intense immigration into Tucumán. Equally important, early efforts to limit immigration
to agriculturalists from Europe led to negative stereotypes of Middle Eastern immigrants.
Arabic-speakers were more likely to be arrested for interpersonal and property crimes
than Spaniards and Italians partly as a result of the dearth of social aid institutions.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The initial section examines the causes of
emigration from Greater Syria and the various discourses and issues, such as relations
with the Ottoman Empire, surrounding this immigrant group once in Argentina. While
much of the scholarship has emphasized the emigration from Mount Lebanon and its
Christian composition, it is also critical to note that thousands of Christians, Jews and
Muslims left from Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo and their hinterlands. Journeying
into the mahjar was not a uniquely Lebanese phenomenon. With modern technologies
such as the telegraph and the international mail service these migrants maintained
constant contact with their homelands through the remission of money and the
encouragement of family members and friends to emigrate. With these interpersonal ties,
the Syrian colony pursued and celebrated close ties to the Ottoman state, especially in the
wake of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

The second section studies the development of the Syrian colony in northwestern
Argentina, principally in Tucumán. The pioneer generation that established commercial
houses and other financially successful economic ventures influenced the spatial

7 Kemal Karpat was one of the first to challenge this claim of Lebanese
exceptionalism, arguing that it was part of a larger phenomenon that spread throughout
the Ottoman Empire. Please see Kemal Karpat, “The Ottoman Emigration to America,
development of the Syrian colony and dictated many of the social and economic relations with newer arrivals. The personal rivalries among the elites of the pioneer generation, coupled with the intensive immigration into Tucumán between 1910 and 1914, prevented the formation of a cohesive and organized Syrian colony. As immigration into Tucumán intensified in the years immediately before World War I, class-based social stratification began to solidify and characterize the Syrian colony. Even with the religious diversity, immigrants in Tucumán were fragmented more by social class than by religious identities by the outbreak of World War I.

**The Ottoman Empire and Syrian Emigration**

The Ottoman Empire governed a vast territory stretching from the Balkans and Algeria in the West, to Yemen in the South, and to Basra in the East and included diverse religious, linguistic, and cultural communities. During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman government initiated a series of reforms, known collectively as the *Tanzimat*, attempting to modernize the bureaucracy, military and polity while protecting its territorial integrity. In the 1860s, a collection of intellectuals coalesced to create the first modern-style opposition movement. Though really a cultural movement, these so-called Young Ottomans founded newspapers to disseminate their ideas. Their efforts helped in the promulgation of a Constitution in 1876 and the election of its first Parliament. While these reforms were being pursued and implemented, the Ottomans suffered a series of military defeats that sliced off large portions of territory and produced thousands of war refugees. For instance, the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) led to a flood of displaced persons and the permanent loss of Romania, Serbia, and
Montenegro. The external conflicts coincided with internal crises as Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid II suspended the constitution in 1878, and initiated a thirty-year period of autocratic rule. The government in Istanbul dealt with famine in Anatolia, lawless Kurdish horsemen, Armenian nationalists, and riots in Mount Lebanon (1860) that led to direct intervention by European powers and an increase in European and North American Christian missionaries.Over time, a loose group of dissidents based in the Empire and Western Europe formed secret societies. Military members of the underground group Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) revolted against ʿAbd al-Hamid in July 1908, sparking what is commonly known as the Young Turk Revolution. The result was the restoration of the Constitution and the transformation of the empire into a constitutional monarchy. The CUP initiated a series of reforms aimed at preserving the Ottoman imperial superstructure and integrating all sectors of society based upon loyalty to the state. The onset of World War I and the decision to join Germany in a defense pact against Russia (August 2, 1914) unleashed a series of events that led to the collapse of the Empire.

The immigration of Arabic-speaking immigrants to Argentina before 1914 experienced two distinct phases. First, a pioneer generation comprised of a disproportionately large group of educated men with better skills arrived with capital. Two critical components that fostered this initial phase of emigration were word of

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mouth dissemination of information and access to schools of the American and European religious missionaries. The Young Turk Revolution of July 1908 and the establishment of consular relations between Argentina and the Ottoman Empire in 1910 marked the beginning of the second stage. The number of Arabic-speaking immigrants entering Argentina grew in the years before these events; however, the annual number of arrivals tripled to 20,000 by 1912, as shown in Chart 2.2. This surge of Arabic-speaking immigrants overwhelmed the Syrian colony in Tucumán. The community there doubled in size between 1910 and 1913, stretching, and in some cases breaking, existing social networks.

![Ottoman Immigrants Arriving in Buenos Aires](chart.png)

While leaders in Istanbul contended with these issues, emigration from Greater Syria increased in intensity. The general expansion of the regional economy and the dissemination of the liberal ideology regarding the freedom of movement spurred this traffic. The Ottoman provinces of Damascus and Aleppo experienced a period of economic growth from 1880 to 1910. Greater agricultural production, the expansion of the railroad, and increased security in the rural areas all had positive effects on a burgeoning industrial sector, primarily in textiles, which targeted new urban and rural markets around Greater Syria.\footnote{Roger Owen, \textit{The Middle East in the World Economy 1800-1914} (London: Methuen, 1981), 244-249, 261-262.} Growing prosperity from the silk industry in Mount Lebanon accustomed the local population to certain living standards, but also increased the price of land, preventing many inhabitants from purchasing land or expanding their holdings.\footnote{Khater, \textit{Inventing Home}, 48-52, 60.} Despite competition from East Asian silk, local silk production expanded in the 1890s and achieved its greatest output in terms of bales exported and value of silk exports between 1903 and 1907. The increasing wealth generated by the silk industry, along with a sliding level of profitability and the social transformations the industry caused, provided the impetus and opportunity for emigration.\footnote{Owen, \textit{The Middle East in the World Economy}, 249-253; Kohei Hashimoto, “Silk, Information and Migrants: The Causes of the Lebanese Migration Reconsidered,” \textit{Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies}, 8 (March 1993): 12.}

The Règlement Organique of 1861, passed in the wake of the 1860 riots, established a governorate, encompassing all of Mount Lebanon, but excluded the coastal cities of Beirut and Tripoli. In addition, the Règlement guaranteed the freedom of movement, breaking peasants’
historical binds to the local secular lords (*shaykh*, pl. *shuyūkh*) and corresponded with the increase of schools run by Christian missionaries offering secular education. This notion of uninhibited passage had filtered into popular culture with the period of intense emigration creating “venues of social and physical movement within and out of the country.” While the average peasant was neither rich nor destitute, land prices, limited employment opportunities and the understanding that emigration was a viable option generated this movement. As many as 100,000 émigrés from Mount Lebanon lived in the Americas by the start of World War I, as did an estimated 40,000 people from Homs and its hinterland, a startling number considering the city had 80,000 inhabitants. By 1914, between 450,000 and 600,000 people from Greater Syria resided in the Americas, a number equal to one-sixth of the regional population in the years before World War I.16

Information about the Americas spread across Greater Syria by informal word of mouth and formal education. Yacoub Debes was one of the first Arabic-speakers to emigrate for the United States, arriving shortly after the Civil War from the small village of Bazoun, Batrūn district of Mount Lebanon. While exiled in Italy, Debes learned of the

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13 A shaykh was a local leader who had earned social prestige and power through economic success. Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 62.


“New World and the bountiful riches in it” and watched ships filled with Italian immigrants leave for the United States. Shortly thereafter, he returned to Bazoun, telling what he had heard and had seen; he then convinced his family and the village youth to sail to the United States. Ezra Teubal, a Jewish immigrant from Aleppo, ended up in Argentina in 1902 because one of his traveling companions failed the medical exam in France for entry into the United States. Stuck in Marseille, the travelers learned about and departed for Argentina. Upon arriving in Buenos Aires, they met up with several acquaintances from Aleppo and began selling cotton textiles as itinerant peddlers. Word of mouth proved critical in encouraging this initial stage of migration. It inspired José Sansón, also from the village of Bazoun, to move to Argentina, where he was the first Arabic-speaking immigrant to reach San Miguel de Tucumán, arriving in 1885. At the turn of the century, the emergence of an Arabic-language press throughout the Americas connected emigrants with their homelands and disseminated tales of the

17 Debes was exiled to Italy in 1866 as part of the settlement between the Ottomans and Yusuf Bey Karam, a Maronite leader of a revolt against the Ottoman Governor Davud Paşa in 1864. For the Karam revolt, see Akarlı, The Long Peace, 37-38, and Makdisi, The Culture of Sectarianism, 277n21. For the story of Debes, see Jūrj ʿAssāf, “Taʾrīkh al-Muhājiira al-Sūriyya al-Lubnāniyya ila-l-Arjuntīn,” al-Haya, Special Edition, Part 1 (1943), 22-23.

18 Nissim Teubal, El inmigrante: de Alepo a Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1953), 67-68. In this moment, the United States refused entry to immigrants with certain ailments, such as trachoma.


Schools, including many run by American and European Christian missionaries, educated generations of boys and girls, introducing them to societies of Europe and the Americas and motivating many to venture into the mahjar. The locations of these missionary schools suggest a correlation between access to liberal and positivist-inflected curriculum and emigration. Northwestern Argentina received immigrants from specific areas within Greater Syria, all of which had schools run by Protestant and Catholic evangelists. For instance, the district of Batrūn in northern Mount Lebanon consisted of a coastal town and many small mountainous villages, including Kahlil Gibran’s home village of Bcharre. By the early 1890s, when emigration to Argentina was beginning to intensify, there were 119 schools servicing 8,200 students in the district. The high school Saint-Jean-Maron, which was supported by the Maronite Patriarch and open to all faiths, offered a curriculum similar to the French missionary schools, and taught its students Latin, Syriac, Arabic, French and Italian. French Catholic missionaries regularly inspected the school that had an enrolment of 150.

Similarly, the city of Homs, the economic capital of the district of Hama situated north of Damascus, possessed 421 schools educating 5,895 students, and included 23 college-level institutions, primarily law and Islamic theology faculties. The Ottoman Ministry of Public Instruction established two public high schools, one for girls, the other
for boys, in Homs that followed curriculum similar to secondary schools in Paris and taught courses in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. The Jesuits ran fifteen free primary schools, in twelve of which French was the primary language of instruction. Six nuns ran the three Catholic schools for girls. The Roman Catholic missions funded these schools and regularly inspected them to maintain quality. Maronite, Greek Catholic and Syrian Catholic residents of Homs sent their children to these religious schools believing the students would receive “primary education at the level of progress achieved in Europe.”

It was not only Christian communities in Greater Syria that benefited from these schools. North American Protestant missionaries established twelve schools in ‘Alawite villages of the sanjak of Latakia, northern-most one of Beirut province, including eight in hamlets near the seat of the district. It seems that these schools were critical in disseminating information about the Americas that may have inspired the departure by many of the local population. In fact, emigration of ‘Alawites was so intense that two villages in the mountains overlooking Latakia have been renamed “‘Argantin” and “Brazin.”

The combination of socioeconomic transformations, cultural shifts in the meaning and role of migration, and the access to information about the Americas led to increasing outflow of Syrians in the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire. Over time, the sharing of information about experiences and opportunities in the Americas, coupled with the


22 Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban et Palestine*, 150, 162; Mériem Cheikh, “Pour une histoire de l’émigration syrienne vers l’Amérique latine. Le cas du Qalamoun, lieu de mémoire” (Master’s Thesis, Université de Provence, 2005), 8n11.
influence of European and North American educational curricula, helped solidify the place of emigration as a legitimate option and established social practice.

**Settling in Argentina**

The pioneer generation of Arabic-speaking immigrants to Argentina was primarily Christian and arrived with capital. Emigration from Greater Syria to South America was expensive, costing between 230 and 250 French francs (1012 to 1100 piasters). Adding traveling costs and certain “intangibles such as bribes and food,” the average peasant who journeyed from Beirut or Tripoli typically possessed 450 francs, with as much as 570 francs, “or close to 2,500 piasters – the salary of a policeman or the tuition at a boarding school for children of the elite in Lebanon.”²³ As in the case of the Spaniards, most of the Arabic-speaking immigrants who landed in Argentina before 1908 came from wealthier regions of Greater Syria, such as Zahla and Homs, and were better off than those who remained, both in material and educational terms.

The initial Syrian immigrants in Buenos Aires overwhelmingly practiced commerce, some eighty-five per cent doing so in 1895, as did their compatriots in northwestern Argentina.²⁴ The existing economic opportunities and the legal rights enshrined in the 1853 Constitution protecting immigrant trade activities attracted many


Syrians. Initially, Arab peddlers in Buenos Aires sold “important amounts of crucifixes, rosaries, medals and other objects of the Christian devotion that were acquired in diverse localities around Mount Lebanon and especially in Jerusalem.” Later, peddling textiles led to monthly profits of ten to twenty pounds (120 to 240 Argentine pesos) and reinforced the notion that Argentina was a place to earn money. Later, peddling textiles led to monthly profits of ten to twenty pounds (120 to 240 Argentine pesos) and reinforced the notion that Argentina was a place to earn money. Little had changed in terms of career vocation by 1909, when two out of every three Arabic-speakers in Argentina engaged in commerce, with peddlers accounting for more than fifty per cent of the merchants. As Akram Khater noted, the choice of earning money quickly meant most immigrants had to choose between commerce and factory work. Peddling required little start-up capital, preparation or ability, and as a result commerce became a characteristic feature of the Arabic-speaking immigrant experience throughout the Americas. The profession also fit a niche in certain regions, such as Brazil, Mexico, and Honduras, where the commercial sector was underdeveloped and new patterns of consumption were emerging.


26 Teubal, El inmigrante, 67.

27 Khater, Inventing Home, 74-75; Alfaro-Velcamp, So Far from Allah, 29-30; Lesser, Negotiating National Identity, 50-51; González, Dollar, Dove, and Eagle, 70-71, 81-82.
The number of Syrians residing in Buenos Aires, however, quadrupled from 3,898 to 15,791 between 1909 and 1914.\textsuperscript{28} This surge in Arabic-speaking immigrants, which followed the 1908 Young Turk Revolution and the establishment of consular relations between Argentina and the Ottoman Empire in 1910, changed the contours of the colony’s labor force. Although the number of peddlers remained constant, they became a smaller percentage of the workforce as the quantity of general laborers doubled.\textsuperscript{29} Furthermore, the sharp increase in the size of this immigrant community led to concentrations in certain wards, such as a noticeable slum in the downtown Socorro district, as well as dispersal into outlying areas. Nearly one-third of Syrians residing in Buenos Aires lived in the southern and southwestern districts where factories, distilleries, meatpacking plants, and various other industries dotted the urban landscape and provided some opportunity for employment.\textsuperscript{30} At the same time, the composition of the colony began to shift. The first consul general of the Ottoman Empire in Buenos Aires Emir Emin Arslan reported in 1910 eighty percent of the immigrant group were Christians,

\textsuperscript{28} Censo general de población, edificación, comercio és industriás de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, Volume I (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1910), 17; Tercer Censo Nacional, 148.

\textsuperscript{29} Schamún, La Colectividad Siria, 12; Schamún, La Siria Nueva, 29. Sofia Martos determined forty per cent of Arabic-speaking immigrants who arrived between 1882 and 1929 were classified as day labourers, whereas only eleven per cent registered as merchants. Sofia D. Martos, The Balancing Act: Ethnicity, Commerce, and Politics among Syrian and Lebanese Immigrants in Argentina, 1890-1955, unpubl. PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2007, 68-70.

\textsuperscript{30} Tercer Censo Nacional, 129-149; Moya, Cousins and Strangers, 155-158, 170.
fifteen percent Muslims, and five percent Jews. In the years leading up to World War I, Muslims represented roughly forty percent of emigrants departing from Tripoli (Beirut province) and in 1913 accounted for thirty-five per cent of the emigrants leaving the Governorate of Jerusalem. In Buenos Aires, Muslims totaled forty percent of the immigrants coming from Greater Syria as early as 1909 and led to the establishment of the Islamic Society in 1910. Migration from Greater Syria had become a “widespread fever, a massive habit” which led to more arrivals per annum with weaker social networks, helping solidify a multi-class structure among Buenos Aires’ Syrian colony.

Many members of the Syrian colony in Argentina, particularly earlier arrivals with their own capital, experienced financial success in their business ventures, and remitted money back to their families. In August 1905, the Ottoman Imperial Bank (OIB) Beirut branch manager estimated remittances to Mount Lebanon from the Americas equaled four million French francs and were being sent directly to banks in Beirut. Previously, emigrants had preferred to send money via London or Paris.

Local


33 Karpat, “Ottoman Emigration to America,” 199.

34 José Moya notes the same phenomenon among emigrants from Spain. He writes, “The social composition of the flow varied according to the stages of its growth curve, with the early phase in the curve containing a disproportionate number of better off or more skilled people.” See Moya, Cousins and Strangers, 230-232.

35 The OIB was not a state bank. It was created with British and French capital in 1856 to insure the repayment of the Ottoman public debt. Its expansion to Ottoman cities
banks estimated in 1910 Syrian immigrants in North and South American remitted thirty-five million francs every year. Writing in 1916, Arthur Ruppin, a German subject and head of the World Zionist Organization’s Palestine Office in Jaffa, noted remittances made up forty-one percent of the annual total income of Mount Lebanon in the immediate years before World War I, averaging just over twenty million francs.

The provinces of Beirut and Damascus also received “not less than 30 million francs, of this 15 million was remitted through banks in Beirut, 12 million through banks in Tripoli, and 3 million through banks in Homs.” Alejandro Schamún, publisher of the Buenos Aires-based Arabic-language periodical *al-Salām (Peace)*, stated the sum reached fifty million francs in one year with twenty million coming from banks in Buenos Aires. In the face of this movement of capital, banks in Buenos Aires such as the Banco Londres y Río de la Plata advertised in local Arabic language publications, offering direct wire services to the OIB office in Beirut, which was expanding its banking services within the Ottoman Empire boundaries. The OIB established branch offices in Homs (1908), Hama (1911) and Zahla (1914), the principal towns in regions of intensive

was marked by the expansion of other banks in the empire. Christopher GA Clay, Professor Emeritus, Department of Historical Studies, University of Bristol, e-mail message to author, September 6, 2004.

36 Archivo de Cancillería, Box 1210, Folder 42, Arturo de Luciano to Argentina’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Victoriano de la Plaza, November 22, 1910. Arturo de Luciano was an Italian subject who later became the Argentine Vice-Consul in Beirut.


38 Arthur Ruppin in Issawi, The Economic History of the Middle East, 272.

39 Schamún, La Siria nueva, 29.
emigration. While Christopher Clay argued this expansion resulted from the opportunities of a growing Ottoman economy and competition from foreign banks, remittances also served as a critical catalyst for local economic development and banking expansion. With thirty to fifty million francs being sent to Greater Syria annually in the years preceding World War I, remittances supported the local economy up to 1914 and may be one reason why the hardships of safar barlik, the famine that resulted from wartime military mobilization (seferberlik in Ottoman Turkish), were felt so acutely during World War I when remittances ceased.

An anti-immigrant sentiment emerged in Argentina during the late 1880s as a response to the economic crash and urban unrest, and intensified during the first two decades of the twentieth century. As the government of Miguel Juárez Celman sold state assets to service the public debt in late 1889 and early 1890, unemployment grew, real

40 Offices of the OIB were founded much earlier on in Beirut in 1863 (the year the bank was founded), Damascus in 1875 and Aleppo in 1893. Homs and Hama are located in present-day Syria, north of Damascus and south of Aleppo. See Al-Salām, July 1912, classified advertisements.


42 I thank Professor Carter Findley for this observation. Safar barlik (Seferberlik in Ottoman Turkish) means mobilization for a (military) campaign; however, the ravages of famine and war that struck the conscripted Arabs during World War I led to this local usage. Roughly 500,000 people died from famine, or one in six of the population of Greater Syria. See Elizabeth Thompson, Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 17-23.
wages depreciated, and new immigrants became the worry of civic groups, newspapers and political leaders. Concerned citizens criticized Argentina’s immigration policy, questioning whether or not the immigrants’ idiosyncrasies and customs could help directly Argentina’s progress or permit the transformation of these people into citizens of a modern nation. The financial and commercial breakdown coupled with dissension among the political elites led to the abortive 1890 revolution, and the ultimate fall of the Juárez Celman government. The first Argentine elite perceptions of the Syrian colony were articulated in the press during this era of socioeconomic distress and political turbulence. In the initial years of immigration to Argentina, two negative stereotypes of the Syrian colony emerged among Argentines, namely the mercachiflè, or ambulatory peddler, and the mendicant. The influential Argentine newspaper El Diario ran a series of critical articles in 1889 examining the phenomenon of Syrian immigration and its perceived shiftless nature.44

Such anti-immigrant discourses circulated throughout the Americas, particularly in Argentina, Brazil, Canada and the United States up to the Second World War. These attitudes would have a direct effect on policy. As popular, violent expressions marked this time period, the Argentine congress passed the Residency Law (1902) and the Law of Social Defense (1910) to expel troublesome immigrants, primarily Spanish and Italian


anarchists. Providing a model for other receiving countries, the United States initiated its much more restrictive quota system in 1921 in order to control the number of undesirable immigrants. In Argentina, officials had long sought immigrants who would be productive members of the nation, such as agriculturalists. This preference was made policy in 1923, and in 1924 the Argentine Foreign Ministry directed its consuls to give preference to farmers and to discourage settlement in the cities.\(^45\) Brazilian intellectuals and politicians, prodded by Brazilian merchants, criticized urban immigrants working in commerce. These political attacks evolved in 1930 into state policy restricting immigration solely to agricultural workers.\(^46\)

As the size of the Syrian colony in Argentina swelled, the local political elite began to comment on society in general and the Arabic-speaking community in particular.\(^47\) The Director of the National Directorate of Migration Juan B. Alsina wrote in the 1899 annual report for his department that the Syrian colony possessed “definite qualities:”\(^48\)


\(^{47}\) The Arabic-speaking population more than tripled between 1896 (3,382 net persons) and 1900 (10,742 net persons). 10,137 immigrants from Greater Syria arrived in 1909 alone for a community registering 51,223 persons. Please see Schamun, *La Siria nueva*, 19 and Klich, “Criollos and Arabic Speakers in Argentina,” 244-245.

\(^{48}\) Quoted in María Elena Vela Rios and Roberto Caimi, “The Arabs in Tucumán, Argentina,” *Asiatic Migrations in Latin America*, Luz M. Martínez Montiel, ed. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1981), 129-130. See also Juan A. Alsina, *Memoria de la*
First, they have no respect for the law. That is, they do not wish to be lodged in the Hotel (for immigrants), or for anyone to find them a job or give them the fare to the provinces... [Rather], they adopt this attitude because they come with the definite intention of settling in cities, and devote themselves to itinerant sales of small hardware goods... Some move to towns in the provinces, while others risk going to the countryside for the same purpose. Most of these merchants are only agents of companies of the same nationality, which do business with a relatively large capital... These immigrants belong to their country’s lower classes. They lack flexibility and most of the social and physical aptitudes that would facilitate their incorporation into and adaptation to a society which differs from their own... The Syrian immigrant does not represent an efficient socio-economic factor, a conclusion that can be reached after the preceding considerations. His role as a consumer is minimal and the part he plays as a producer is non-existent. The ambulatory trade he devotes himself to fills no need of exchange. In this sense his work – far from being beneficial – results in excessive competition, causing established small businessmen, who deserve certain considerations, many economic problems.

The perception of the ubiquitous Syrian itinerant peddler captivated the Argentine imagination. In 1902 the Buenos Aires weekly Caras y Caretas published an article entitled “Los Turcos en Buenos Aires” (“The Turks in Buenos Aires”), which argued this immigrant group was an “irritant” that offered “detrimental examples for a working people.”

The local newspaper criticized itinerant peddlers and small shopkeepers located in the province of Salta at the turn of the century: “A plague of Turkish peddlers has appeared, worse than if they were locusts. The police must prevent them from

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Dirección de Inmigración correspondiente al año 1899 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de M. Biedma e Hijo, 1900), 79-80.

49 “Los turcos en Buenos Aires,” Caras y Caretas, March 1, 1902. The weekly periodical targeted the burgeoning middle class of Buenos Aires.
continuing to commit such abuse.” While a strong prejudicial discourse against the Arabic-speaking immigrants circulated throughout Argentina, the Syrian colony did have important supporters, such as Agricultural Minister Damián Torino and national Senator and founder of the University of La Plata Joaquín V. González.

Commentary by Alsina and other publications led to a program in 1903 spearheaded by Wadi and Alejandro Schamún, publishers of the periodical *al-Salām*, to draft recent arrivals from Greater Syria to work on an agricultural colony in Santa Fe, an effort that continued for a decade and was appreciated by local politicians and observers. This was an attempt to mollify public and government opinion, which had identified the link between “agricultural and demographic development” since the 1820s. Moving more Arabic-speakers into the agricultural sector was also a primary task for the newly arrived Ottoman Consul General in late 1910. This strategy

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52 “Los Árabes en la República,” *La Prensa*, 17 November 1906; “La Colectividad Siria en la Republica,” *La Prensa*, 10 May 1907; Governor José Inocencio Arias (Buenos Aires Province) to Alejandro Schamún, 29 July 1912. A facsimile of this letter recognizing the efforts to steer Syrian immigrants into the agricultural sector is located in Akmir, “La inmigración árabe a Argentina,” 837.


corresponded with the agricultural economic boom Argentina experienced after it had renegotiated debt repayment with Baring Brothers in 1893. By 1909, only 5,300 Arabic-speaking immigrants, or roughly ten percent of the community, worked in the agricultural sector. This increased to 12,000 in 1917. While there was an anti-immigrant discourse circulating throughout Argentina, it is clear that Syrian immigrants could and did adjust to local labor markets and economic niches. In addition, it was common for these immigrants to utilize Argentine state institutions to pursue their rights, protect their interest, and seek redress, and elite members of the Syrian colony made connections with Argentine political elites and social institutions.

As the Syrian colonies negotiated the realities of living in Argentina, they also had to contend with intense political transformations in the old country. Settled immigrants in Argentina had petitioned the Ottoman state since 1890 to establish diplomatic relations with Buenos Aires. In fact, a delegation of émigrés living in Buenos Aires met with Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid II in Istanbul lobbying to establish

55 Alejandro Schamún, _La Colectividad Siria en la República Argentina_ (Buenos Aires 1910), 12; Schamún, _La Siria Nueva_, 29.

56 For instance, María Miguel de Torbai won a judgment from the Buenos Aires appellate court in 1890 confirming her right to practice commerce in Buenos Aires. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Miguel de Torbai sobre venia supletoria, Tribunal Civil, File M, Number 70, 1890.

57 Samuel Baily and José Moya briefly discussed the role of homeland politics in regard to the Italian and Spanish communities, asserting neither group was overwhelmed in forming community institutions. In a separate work, Baily and Ramella excised the portion of letters dealing with politics in Italy, saying they were of minor importance. Baily, _Immigrants in the Lands of Promise_, 173-181; Moya, _Cousins and Strangers_, 318-327; Baily and Ramella, _One Family, Two Worlds_, 1-23.

diplomatic relations with Argentina and to found a consulate in Buenos Aires. The Arabic-speaking communities in the Americas possessed “close and friendly contact” with Istanbul in spite of pockets of political dissidence among these communities.

Before the outbreak of World War I, the Syrian colony shared an Ottoman political identity which acted as a unifying factor across broad sections of this immigrant community, and demonstrated widespread loyalty to the Ottoman state through expressive culture and public celebrations. Similar sentiments emerged among Syrian immigrants in the United States and Venezuela.

Syrian immigrants in Argentina organized large public events and published several periodicals pledging and celebrating their loyalty to the Ottoman state, especially in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution. The restoration of the Ottoman Constitution and the return to democratic governance provided a heady elixir of communal identification and a source of pride that was commemorated by the Syrian colonies throughout Argentina. For instance, following the July 1908 revolution in Istanbul, the Syrian-Ottoman Commission (Comisión Sirioottomana) organized a mass patriotic event held on September 8 in Buenos Aires at the Casa Suiza. The organizers published a poster in local periodicals that featured the Ottoman Coat of Arms and images of five key figures of Ottoman sociopolitical life: the Young Ottoman author and thinker Namık

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60 Karpat, “The Ottoman Emigration to America,” 193.

Kemal Bey (1840-1888); the financier of the Young Ottoman Party Mustafa Fazil Paşa (1829-1875); Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid II (1842-1918); one of the authors of the 1876 Ottoman Constitution Midhat Paşa (1822-1884); and the director of Meschveret, the organ of the Young Turk Party, Ahmed Rıza (1858-1930). These leaders were neither part of the Young Turk movement – save Ahmed Rıza – nor from the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire; however, they were mostly identified in some way with the Revolution and were celebrated throughout Argentina. The symbols were uniquely Ottoman, as opposed to Arab, Syrian or Lebanese. Furthermore, conflating members of the Young Ottoman movement with the Young Turks and recognizing Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid’s role in reinstating the constitution illustrates that the Syrian immigrants were not yet well informed about the events unfolding in Istanbul.62

The day of the event, the Liga Albanesa (Albanian League) held a public demonstration commemorating the “transcendental resolution” of Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid II. That night, the most distinguished members of the Syrian colony celebrated with its most modest members beneath Ottoman flags and Chinese lanterns; many families congregated in the elevated theatre boxes in the Casa Suiza. In the hallway and reception room, “trophies and emblems highlighted the crescent moon and the Turkish national colors.” On the proscenium, an ensemble of girls, one portraying Liberty, performed. To the right stood a portrait of Midhat Paşa, the “glorious martyr and source of inspiration of

62 Carter Findley notes similar confusion throughout the empire in wake of the promulgation of the Ottoman constitution. Press censorship prevented the dissemination of accurate information surrounding the events of July 1908 and, actually, made the revolution far more of a surprise than it could have been otherwise. Findley, Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity, 160-165.
the constitution of 1876.” The event commenced with a rendition of the Argentine national hymn, which was followed by the Ottoman anthem.63

Several leading members of the Syrian colony gave speeches. The orators spoke of the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire, newly incorporated into the world of free societies. They remembered the “martyrs who gave their blood for the liberty of Turkey and honored the memory of Midhat Paşa,” and recognized, among the “current and most brilliant leaders of the Young Turks,” Prince Sabahaddin. In addition, the orators saluted the generosity of Argentina, a country “that countenances sustained battles for giving liberty to other people, whose aurora glows finally on their distant homeland.” In an impromptu act, a celebrant gave a “vibrant speech” from a chair in the middle of the crowd.64 The following July, the Syrians in Buenos Aires organized a massive celebration at the Coliseo Argentino, one of the premier theatres in the capital city, to mark the first anniversary of the constitution’s restoration. At the festivities “more than 4,000 Syrians were congregated on a memorable night to applaud in every tone the happy event that came to transform the politico-social life of the Turkish nation.”65


64 “La constitución otomana,” La Nación, September 9, 1908. The orators were Antonio Arida (president of the commission), Jacobo Suaya, Felipe Omad, Jorge Assaf, Wadi Schamún (editor of al-Salâm), Elias Homaine, Hafez Tarazi, Labid Riache, and Alejandro Schamún (director of al-Salâm).

65 Schamún, La Síria nueva, 81.
The outburst of Ottoman national pride could be seen far beyond Buenos Aires. Elias Turbay, a merchant based in the small Tucumán town Río Seco, circulated a poem entitled “How Beautiful is Freedom and the Constitutional Country.” The Syrian colony in Salta, the capital of the province of the same name, held a banquet in October 1908 celebrating the restoration of the constitution. The event was held in the exclusive Club 20 de Febrero, suggesting a measure of communal organization and acceptance on the part of local Salteño society. In 1913, Nagib Baacini, a merchant in San Miguel de Tucumán, Elias Turbay and Simón Hamati, who recently arrived in Tucumán from Buenos Aires, established the periodical *al-Fatā Suriyya (Young Syria)*, “on the occasion of the Ottoman Constitution.”

In spite of these celebrations, anti-Ottoman movements formed throughout the Syrian émigré communities around the world. In early 1909, the Paris-based Syrian Society, founded by Nakhla Pasha Mutran and his brother Rashid Bey Mutran, announced the formation of the Arab Society in Argentina, which advocated Syrian independence and separation from the Ottoman Empire. On March 30, 1909, the Buenos

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66 Elias Turbay, *al-Manzumūt al-Durrīyya* (Tucumán: Maṭba‘ Jarīda al-Waṭan, 1917), 120. In the nine years that passed between the writing of the poem and its publication in the book, Turbay had completed an about face in terms of political allegiance. Apparently it was a particularly sensitive issue because Turbay felt compelled to include a clarification in the poem’s introduction. Other poems in the collection are very Arab nationalistic in tone, including a eulogy to the Great Arab Revolt of 1916 against the Ottomans.

67 Scobie, *Secondary Cities of Argentina*, 151. Scobie incorrectly notes that the celebration commemorated the independence of the Republic of Turkey.

Aires-based Arabic-language newspaper *al-Zamān (The Epoch)*, published by Miguel and Nagib Samra, printed a letter to the President of the Ottoman Parliament entitled “Protest from the Syrian émigrés in Argentina against the ‘Syrian Society’ in the city of Paris” that eviscerated the claims of the Paris organization. The letter announced that they, as Syrians and émigrés in Argentina, have declared their “genuine loyal attachment and authentic fidelity to the Constitution and the unshakeable Ottoman unity, as… we witnessed in the public demonstration we organized to celebrate it.” In addition, the protest proclaimed six theses. First, despite the claim of Mutran Pasha and the Syrian Society, the colony had never heard of his having a party or a following in Argentina. Second, the only Society that the collective in Argentina knew and cared to know was the Free Constitutional Ottoman Society. Third, the community in Argentina stood ready to resist physically those who slandered the Ottoman state or continued to advocate the division of the country along ethno-national lines. Fourth, Syrians in Argentina, regardless of creed, informed the Ottoman Society that they did not challenge its firm hope for the empire. Fifth, they requested the venerable Ottoman Parliament refute the current of thought espoused by the group in Paris by informing and educating the youth.

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69 Supplement to *al-Zamān*, no. 300, March 30, 1909. The directors Miguel and Naguib Samra of *al-Zamān* were two Christian brothers from a village near Tripoli. The paper’s front page possessed both the Argentine and Ottoman Coat of Arms. According to notes found in the file at the Centre des Archives Nationales in Beirut, the paper’s role in Syrian life in Argentina was critical. The Samra brothers acted as interlocutors and conciliators between the Arabic-speaking community and Argentines, as well as peacemakers within the community itself. In addition, they played a critical role in simmering down the controversy between the Ottoman Consul Emir Emin Arslan and certain members of the collective who rejected Arslan’s attempt to give Ottoman citizenship. See file on *al-Zamān*, Centre des Archives Nationales, Beirut, Lebanon.

70 Ibid.
Finally, they declared that the people in the Argentine mahjar did not agree with anything that appeared in the publications of the Parisian society and rejected every claim that “harms the country or the Ottoman Society.”

The Young Turk Revolution also gave added impetus to those Syrian immigrants advocating for a diplomatic accord between Buenos Aires and Istanbul. The Schamún brothers, themselves sons of a high-ranking Ottoman official in Mount Lebanon, led the push for formal diplomatic relations. Alejandro Schamún sent a letter to Suleiman al-Bustani, a member of the Ottoman parliament and scion of a prominent Beirut family, on December 30, 1908. The seven-point communication provided statistics on the size and location of the colony in Argentina, their commercial importance, and extract of a meeting with Argentine Foreign Minister and future President Víctorino de la Plaza, tariff information, and import and export data. The meeting with de la Plaza was perhaps fortuitous because the Foreign Minister had travelled throughout the Levant and supposedly admitted to Schamún his desire to establish relations with the Sublime Porte. He also confirmed to Schamún his order to the Argentine ambassador in London to host a “pourparler” with his Ottoman counterpart to start the talks. After negotiations in London, Argentina’s Minister Plenipotentiary to Italy and future President Roque Sáenz Peña and Ottoman Ambassador to Italy Hüseyin Kâzım Bey signed a consular protocol in Rome on June 11, 1910, an agreement conceding rights to each nation to name consuls and vice-consuls in all ports and commercial zones. While this was a success for many Syrian promoters, many later viewed the protocol as deficient because the jurisdiction of

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71 Ibid.
the Ottoman Consul in Buenos Aires was restricted to the city limits. If the Argentine state recognized the place of the Ottoman Consul when he attempted to intervene on behalf of his compatriots outside the federal capital, it was done irregularly and only as an “indulgence.”

The establishment of consular relations in 1910 between the Ottoman Empire and Argentina coincided with an intensification of migration from Greater Syria to the River Plate. In addition, the protocol arranged for the founding of an Ottoman consulate in Buenos Aires. On October 29, 1910, Emir Emin Arslan, the first Consul General, arrived aboard the steamship “Chili” to an exuberant welcome by a crowd of 4,000 Ottoman subjects. In preparation for Arslan’s arrival, a mass of people, including members of the Unión Siria (Syrian Union) and the Sociedad Israelita (Israelite Society), marched from the hall of the Sociedad Juventud Otomana (Young Ottoman Society). They were led by immigrants holding and waving banners and flags of all three organizations. Another parade of Arabic-speaking immigrants marched to the central docks from the southern neighborhood of La Boca. After the crowd had waited for more than three hours, Arslan’s ship, flying the Ottoman flag at full mast, docked, and bands from the Sociedad Juventud Otomana and the Sociedad Israelita performed the Argentine national anthem, the Ottoman national hymn, and the Marseillaise. Consul Arslan offered words of thanks to the throng of compatriots and to Argentina for its generosity.

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The reception committee then ushered Arslan into a waiting car and set off for the Plaza Hotel, the fanciest hotel in the Capital. A procession of people on foot, extending over several city blocks, followed a motorcade of eighty automobiles, “occupied by Turkish men and women.” The excitement grew when Argentine spectators from the balconies overlooking the famed Florida Street began saluting the “colectividad otomana,” or Ottoman community, as the marchers below praised Argentina. Once at the hotel, Arslan appeared on a balcony overlooking the assembled Ottoman subjects and the Plaza San Martin giving his thanks to the organization committee. From the crowd, a gentleman representing the Ottoman Jewish community expressed satisfaction in the coming of the “representative of Turkey.” After moving on to the editorial offices of the periodical *al-Salām*, the bands played the national hymns again and then the crowd dispersed “with the same enthusiasm demonstrated during the entire day.”

Syrians in Argentina maintained connections to the Ottoman government and various Arab movements in the immediate years before the war. They questioned the Vice-President of the Ottoman Parliament, Suleiman al-Bustani about the slowness of the political reforms promised by the CUP, sent an envoy to a 1911 conference held in Egypt concerning political reform in the Ottoman Empire, received an appeal for support from the Lebanese Committee of Paris regarding political reform proposals in 1912, and entertained a request for editorials relating political positions in regard to the Ottoman

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Administrative Decentralization Party’s platform.\textsuperscript{74} Hence, allegiance to and affinity for the Ottoman Empire was widespread in the Syrian colonies, and cut across class lines and religious identities. Expressions of loyalty to the Ottoman state were not particular to Buenos Aires, but rather seemed to galvanize many Arabic-speaking immigrants in Argentina. Indeed, these sentiments were similar to other Syrian communities in the Americas, and it was in this environment that the Syrian colony in Tucumán began to emerge and grow in size.

\textbf{Settling in the Tucumán and the Northwest}

The Syrian colony in Tucumán emerged much later than the other principal immigrant groups, namely the Spanish and Italians. By 1895, this immigrant group registered only 183 people in the province of Tucumán, whereas the Spanish, Italians and French accounted for 3,985, 3,303, and 1,353 persons respectively.\textsuperscript{75} These Europeans represented four-fifths of the immigrant population in the province of Tucumán in 1895. 

\textsuperscript{74} Copies of the correspondence, dated February 4, 1910, February 24, 1911, June 25, 1912, and May 6, 1913 respectively, are in Akmir, \textit{La inmigración árabe en Argentina}, 784-796. The Decentralisation Party, founded in January 1913, was based in Egypt, led by Syrian émigrés, and advocated administrative decentralisation of the Arab lands within the Ottoman imperial superstructure. Philip S. Khoury, \textit{Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus, 1860-1920} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 63-64.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Segundo Censo de la República Argentina}, Volume II, 537. The precise calculation of the Syrian colony is complicated. In the period before the 1914 census, there is no standardized method to classify immigrants from Greater Syria. They appear in the 1895 census and the statistical annuals for the province of Tucumán as “Asiáticos” (Asians) and “Turcos” (Turks). Taken together, the population is 183 (93 Asiáticos, 90 Turcos). I am confident that an Asiático is primarily an immigrant from Greater Syria because in the provincial statistical annuals “Arabe” (Arab) is a subset of the Asiático grouping. In addition, there are specific entries in the 1895 census for Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and Persian immigrants.
Each of these three groups had established social aid institutions in 1900 for the general welfare of its compatriots; something the Arabic-speakers could not do until the 1920s. The size of the Syrian colony increased to 4,155 in 1914 and accounted for thirteen percent of the immigrant population and just more than one percent of the provincial population.76

The colony’s development was linked directly to the emergence of an Arabic-speaking merchant elite in the provincial capital of San Miguel. The earliest immigrants in San Miguel de Tucumán settled along Maipú Street, an area several blocks northwest from the central plaza. Over time this area evolved into the heart of the Syrian colony, as immigrants founded churches, set up businesses, and occupied tenements. Nevertheless, the Arabic-speaking immigrant group, despite its increasing importance in the commercial sector and concentration in a particular part of San Miguel, could not organize itself for two reasons. Firstly, intense personal rivalries and skulduggery by the leading merchants provoked multiple court cases and divided the elites of the colony. Infighting overwhelmed the arbitration mechanisms inherent in micro-social networks and provoked the utilization of Argentine state institutions to seek redress. In addition, a scandal of fraudulent bankruptcies in 1911 further divided the merchant elite and placed the Syrian colony in a vulnerable position relative to local society, necessitating the help from a leading Arabic-speaking public intellectual based in Buenos Aires.

Secondly, a massive wave of Arabic-speakers into Tucumán overwhelmed established micro-social networks that had previously absorbed new arrivals and

76 *Tercer Censo de la República Argentina*, Volume II, 303
facilitated adaptation. The population of the Syrian colony in San Miguel de Tucumán quadrupled between 1909 and 1914 and tripled province-wide in the same period. At the same time, recurrent crises in the sugar-based regional economy adversely affected seasonal labor, as jobs grew scarce and unreliable. As a result, a multi-class structure solidified, further fragmenting this immigrant group. Those who possessed weaker social networks and/or worked as unskilled and menial labor were more susceptible to the ebbs and flows of the regional economy, which was based on the cultivation and processing of sugar cane. These immigrants experienced a contingent reality marked by violence, arrest and a variety of strategies to ameliorate one’s situation, such as marrying into local Argentine families.

**Syrian merchants and stunted community formation**

The earliest recorded attempt to organize the community in the Tucumán mahjar was the formation of the *Sociedad Turco-Argentina* (Turkish-Argentine Society) in 1898. This group, a collection of traders and peddlers who attempted to use their numbers to secure lower prices by purchasing goods in bulk from wholesalers, consisted primarily of Maronites from Mount Lebanon. Personal rivalries, however, ultimately caused its dissolution. On June 10, 1898, the Tucumán daily *El Ordén* published a letter signed by thirteen members of the organization, including two vice-presidents. The missive

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attacked the sitting president Manuel Malcún for his incorrect behavior (*procederes poco correctos*) against the society. Declaring that the president was a debtor to the organization, the signatories announced that Malcún had been expelled from the organization and any debt he may have contracted in the society’s name after May 30 would not be honored.\textsuperscript{78}

This public broadside publicized an internal conflict for power and set off a series of legal proceedings where Malcún attempted to clear his name and punish his accusers. On June 23, nineteen members of the society, including four signatories of the original letter, published a note in *El Orden* protesting the June 10 broadside against Malcún.\textsuperscript{79} The authors denounced the accusation that Malcún had been deposed from his position of president and recognized his honor and competence on behalf of the association. The letter further argued that the June 10 declaration was the work of two or three displeased members who had deceived fellow members into signing something they could not read. The authors concluded by proclaiming that those responsible would receive the justice they deserved.\textsuperscript{80} On August 18, the judge ruled in favor of Malcún and condemned Julian Llumplat and eight others to six months in prison and a 250 pesos fine. On August 22, the defendants’ appeared before the judge and offered to submit a written retraction of the original accusations in exchange for the dismissal of the court case. Manuel Malcún agreed to the arrangement provided that the retraction was published in both of

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{78} *El Orden*, June 10, 1898

\textsuperscript{79} *El Orden*, June 23, 1898. The letter concludes with the signatories and the note declaring that there are additional signatures.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.}
Tucumán’s newspapers, to which the defendants agreed. The judge then dismissed the case, ordering the defendants to pay court fees and Malcún’s attorney costs.\footnote{Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Tucumán (hereafter AHPT), Box 220, File 13, fojas 38-42, “Autos y vistos,” August 22, 1898.}

In July 1899, Manuel Malcún initiated another criminal proceeding that accused Julian Llumplat and Antonio Yaya of giving false testimony during a civil trial between Manuel Malcún and Domingo Kairuz, a wealthy and prominent Arabic-speaking merchant based in Buenos Aires.\footnote{Domingo Kairuz was also the brother of Amado Kairuz, a defendant in the 1898 case for\textit{ injurias graves}, and married to the sister of Julian Llumplat’s wife.} Malcún was suing Domingo Kairuz for nonpayment related to the delivery of goods to Llumplat on behalf of Kairuz. Julian Llumplat argued that he had received the goods in question, but had paid Malcún in full. Manuel Malcún argued that he never received compensation for the delivered products.\footnote{AHPT, Box 226, File 3, Por falso testimonio.}

The case centered on whether or not the goods in question had been delivered to Kairuz in payment for the debt that Malcún owed. In May 1898, Malcún had been declared bankrupt after the initiation of a court proceeding by his creditors, including Domingo Kairuz. By October 1898, Malcún made arrangements with his creditors for repayment. At this moment, Malcún distributed goods to his creditors and settled his arrears.\footnote{AHPT, Box 226, File 3, “Audiencia,” fojas 30-31, December 19, 1899.} According to court testimony, Domingo Kairuz and Manuel Malcún agreed to terms, signed \textit{recibos} (bills of receipt) and then passed Kairuz’s goods to Llumplat for further distribution on consignment to the \textit{mercachifles}, or itinerant peddlers, from the
Syrian colony. Additional testimony attested to the bitter relationship between Malcún and Llumplat that emerged from the 1898 court case as well as other, unspecified altercations. As the court case proceeded, it is likely that other members from the Syrian colony intervened in the dispute and mediated between the feuding parties. Manuel Malcún arrived before the judge on March 29, 1900 renouncing his accusations and requesting the dismissal of criminal case. The parties agreed to pay their respective court fees, and the judge closed the case and lifted the embargo on Llumplat’s and Yaya’s property.

The internal strife and subsequent actions by Manuel Malcún illustrate the volatile, contentious, and fragile nature of social networks among immigrant groups, especially between competing elites. A primary function of social networks is to arbitrate and mediate conflict within the community; however, in these two cases this mechanism initially failed. Llumplat and his allies utilized an Argentine periodical to attack Malcún, making public an internal contest for power. Malcún, in turn, employed Argentine state institutions to seek redress and inflict punishment against his enemies. Ultimately, it seems that internal mediation within the immigrant group convinced the disputants to settle their differences in order to prevent imprisonment of fellow compatriots. In the aftermath of the Malcún and Llumplat-Kairuz feud, the Sociedad Turco-Argentina dissolved.

Despite these difficulties, the number of Syrian merchants and their collective wealth in the province of Tucumán continued to grow. Sugar production tripled between

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1900 and 1914, but was fraught with difficulties from overproduction and arguments over taxation and quotas on production. With the expansion of the provincial economy, San Miguel de Tucumán, whose population more than doubled between 1895 and 1913, became a pole of attraction for many in the Tucumán mahjar. In addition, servicing the company towns that emerged next to the sugar factories became a niche market for enterprising merchants from the Syrian colony. Nevertheless, down cycles of the sugar industry had a direct impact on the province’s merchants, including Syrians. For instance, the Ley de Machete, passed by the provincial legislature in July 1902, put in place a quota system to control sugar production. It reduced output by one-third and had the derivative effect of reducing jobs for cane cutters.\(^{86}\) As a possible result, the number of Arabic-speaking merchants declined by nearly one-quarter between 1902 and 1904.

Despite the persistent difficulties associated with the sugar industry, the overall number of Arabic-speaking merchants in the province grew from ninety-seven in 1899 to 438 in 1913, a four-fold increase (Chart 2.4). In that same time period, the wealth of Syrian merchants, measured primarily in real estate, inventory and cash, increased from 281,590 pesos to 5,257,724 pesos; a remarkable augmentation of nearly twenty-fold (Chart 2.5). Of the 108 merchants who enrolled with the Registro Público de Comercio (Public Register of Commerce) seventy-three were based in the provincial capital. By 1913, a Syrian immigrant in San Miguel de Tucumán was more than three times more

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87 Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1899 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1901), 209; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1913 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1916), 211.
likely than the average immigrant to be a merchant. Following the abolition of company stores in 1903, Syrian merchants began to establish stores in towns adjacent to sugar mills and throughout the sugar cane region. This change in provincial law would have a direct impact on the growth and increasing wealth of the Syrian merchant community, as several of these firms would ultimately become sole providers for certain mills.88

Commerce was the lifeblood of the swelling, yet stratified, Syrian colony.

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88 For a recent discussion of the political economy of the Tucumán sugar industry, please see María Celia Bravo, *Campesinos, azúcar y política: cañeros, acción corporativa y vida política en Tucumán, 1895-1930* (Rosario, Argentina: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2008), 45-69. Archivo del Poder Judicial de la Provincia de Tucumán (hereafter APJ), Registro Público de Comercio, Volumes 1-4. The collection of this data is less than scientific. It was not uncommon for immigrants from Greater Syria to take on a Hispanic name and surname upon arrival. As such, I concede that I may not have accounted for every Arabic-speaking immigrant who registered with the state. In addition, it was not mandatory to record one’s name with the public register. Many merchants seemed to have registered with the local justice of the peace, which satisfied the requirements of the law. This fact also explains the discrepancy between the number of merchants from the Syrian colony in the statistical annuals (438 in 1913) and the public register (108 who registered between 1896 and 1913).
Chart 2.4. Number of Merchants, Province of Tucumán, 1899-1913. Source: Anuario correspondiente al año de 1899, 209; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1900 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1901), 181; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1902 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1903), 172; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1904 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1905), 179; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1907 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1908), 190; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1908 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1909), 193; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1910 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1911), 201; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1912 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1914), 199; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1913, 211.
As Chart 2.5 indicates, the wealth of the Syrian merchants grew at a faster rate than that of the other principal merchant groups; however, on the eve of World War I, they still had not surpassed that of the Italians and Spaniards. Yet, as Chart 2.6 shows, the average wealth per merchant in the Syrian colony was nearly 9,000 Argentine pesos. This number placed them second only to the Spanish immigrants, and more than doubled the merchant average of Argentine and Italian commerce in the province of Tucumán.

The probable cause is that Arabic-speaking immigrants, like an early generation of Spanish merchants, increasingly established businesses as wholesalers, including some
fantastically wealthy firms. For instance, the company Getar Hermanos y Compañía declared the firm’s worth at 236,350 pesos in a 1909 merchant contract. Nevertheless, there was great disparity in wealth among Arabic-speaking merchants. In comparison to the average merchant in the province in 1913, those from the Syrian colony fared well. Yet, it seems that much of this wealth was concentrated in about a dozen firms. Arabic-speaking immigrants crafted thirty-three merchant contracts between 1900 and 1913 delineating the *capital social*, or the firm’s money and material goods, such as property. The average value of the firm was 55,304 pesos and usually included two or three partners (*socios*). By all metrics, the Syrian merchant class was becoming an economic force in the province of Tucumán in particular by 1914.

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89 APJ, Contratos Mercantiles, Registro Público de Comercio, Volume 8, 262.

90 APJ, Contratos Mercantiles, Registro Público de Comercio, Volumes 5-11.

91 The Buenos Aires newspaper *La Prensa* noted the increasing strength of Syrian merchants in Tucumán, as well as in the provinces of Córdoba, Santa Fe and San Juan, as early as 1906. “Los árabes en la República,” *La Prensa*, November 17, 1906.
Chart 2.6. Merchandise Wealth per Merchant, Province of Tucumán, 1899-1913. Source: Anuario correspondiente al año de 1899, 209; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1900, 181; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1901 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1902), 181; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1902, 172; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1904, 179; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1905 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1907), 187; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1907, 190; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1908, 193; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1909 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1911), 232; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1910, 201; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1911 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1913), 188; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1912, 199; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1913, 211.

In 1911, a series of fraudulent bankruptcies in Tucumán by a group of Arabic-speaking immigrants thrust the Syrian colony and its commercial elite into a vulnerable social position. The initial investigation focused on four Arabic-speaking immigrants –
Amado Caram, Julian Debes, Alberto Fagre, and Fortunato Solis – and their connection to a “shadowy” organization called the Unión de Bazún whose program augmented members’ wealth via fraudulent bankruptcies, accidental fires, or simply absconding in the dead of night. The local daily El Orden led the crusade to uncover this secret society, interviewing the president of the association Julian A. Chaya. With Felipe Nazar acting as a translator, Julian Chaya explained that the Unión de Bazún was a transnational organization consisting of members who hailed from this small village in northern Mount Lebanon with branches in Salta, Rosario, Buenos Aires and North America. Their purported fundamental objective, which circulated throughout the American mahjar via the Arabic press, was to raise money to build a school in their home village. Chaya admitted that Debes, Solis and Caram were members of the association; however, he challenged the implication that the actions of these individuals could permit blame to be placed on all members of the immigrant group. In regard to the police investigation, Julian Chaya conceded that all of the merchants from the Syrian colony were aggrieved by the accusations, and found themselves in an endlessly uncomfortable situation. Julian Chaya confessed that the accused Caram had cheated him too.

The perceived vulnerability was such that the elites asked Buenos Aires-based Alejandro Schamún, a leading intellectual and publisher of the Arabic-language periodical al-Salām, to write an article defending the Syrian colony in Tucumán, which


93 “Las quiebras fraudulentas,” El Orden, March 15, 1911.
was published in *El Orden*. Schamún challenged several myths about Arabic-speakers in Argentina without mentioning the activities of Caram and his conspirators. Firstly, he dismissed the notion that the average Syrian was a temporary immigrant who came to accumulate money and then returned to his homeland. Schamún pointed out that according to official statistics more than eighty percent of the 60,345 Syrians who had entered Argentina since 1890 had settled permanently in the country. Schamún then apologized for the persistent figure of the itinerant peddler, but emphasized that their numbers dwindled as more and more members of the Syrian colony found work in the agricultural sector, including agricultural colonies in neighboring provinces. Alejandro Schamún concluded by encouraging Argentine industrial and agricultural companies to hire *obreros sirios* (Syrian workers) because these immigrants were “sober, obedient, unpretentious” and never have revealed sympathy towards anarchism.

In an environment with a broad and heightened anti-immigrant sentiment, the Syrian merchant elite was rightly concerned about their place in local society, as many had made important connections with local social and cultural elite institutions such as the Sociedad Sarmiento. The exploits of Amado Caram and his crew threatened to undermine the social and financial advances that many merchants had achieved during the previous fifteen years.

The anti-immigrant discourses, including those targeting the Syrian colony, that circulated throughout Argentina caused concern. Leading intellectuals and public

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95 Ibid.
officials criticized massive immigration as well as particular immigrant groups. The prevailing scholarship, however, has equated these discourses with prejudicial Argentine state institutions that either worked against immigrants or were indifferent to their demands. The evidence from Tucumán contradicts this view and presents a complicated relationship between the state and the Syrian colony. Provincial state institutions actively protected the interests and property of Arabic-speaking immigrants in certain situations.

On the morning of December 7, 1901, Intendente Ramón González of Bella Vista, a small town south of Tucumán’s provincial capital San Miguel, was summoned to the home of Jorge Fiad, an Arabic-speaking Ottoman subject and local merchant. According to the local official, Fiad’s behavior, strange and loud, “seemed demented” because he had torn up a certain amount of money and thrown more down the well on his property. The concerned official and Fiad’s neighbors had him interned at a local infirmary where the stricken merchant was diagnosed with enajenación mental (insanity) caused by a virus. Intendente González collected the remaining cash on sight, called for a physician from San Miguel, designated the local merchant José Gabino Nuñez as depositorio (guardian) of Fiad’s money, and empowered him to cover Fiad’s expenses, such as medical fees, with the sealed funds. Intendente González also made arrangements to deposit the funds in the Provincial Bank and commissioned the Justice of the Peace to

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conduct an inventory of Fiad’s shop. The merchandise was then placed under the protection of another local merchant, Miguel Salazar.97

In January 1902, local authorities transferred Jorge Fiad to a hospice in San Miguel de Tucumán and requested that a Curador *Ad Litem*, or guardian *ad litem*, be assigned to safeguard the ill immigrant’s interests.98 In April, the judge decided to sell Fiad’s furniture to help pay for costs, such as the rent for his shop in Bella Vista. On May 10, the guardian *ad litem* requested a delay in the auction of Fiad’s items.99 Jorge Fiad was pronounced healthy in early July and then appeared before the judge requesting his property and money that had been held on his behalf. The judge complied and released Fiad’s goods and money, which he received by August 11, 1902.

Following the sudden illness of a resident of the province, the legal code compelled local officials and institutions to establish a variety of arrangements to maintain and safeguard the interests of the incapacitated merchant. Any expenditure of the registered wealth had to be supported by a receipt and approved by a judge. The fact that the law was implemented for an immigrant sheds light on how state institutions were, at times, guarantors for one’s wealth and well-being, regardless of citizenship.

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97 AGPT, Box 388, File 4, Series C, letters dated January 9 and 19, 1902. The cash found in Fiad’s house equalled 2690 pesos. His merchandise amounted to 5192 pesos.

98 A guardian *ad litem* is a person appointed by a court only to take legal action on behalf of a minor or an incapacitated adult. *Ad litem* translates literally from the Latin as “for the suit.” [http://dictionary.law.com/default2.asp?typed=guardian+ad+litem&type=1](http://dictionary.law.com/default2.asp?typed=guardian+ad+litem&type=1) (Accessed February 17, 2011).

99 AGPT, Box 388, File 4, Series C, letter from Curador *Ad Litem* to Judge, May 10, 1902.
In another instance, on the morning of 2 November 1907, Pedro Jorrat informed the Justice of the Peace of Pozo del Alto, Tucumán, that his cousin Julian had died of acute encephalitis three days earlier in the provincial capital of San Miguel. Pedro admitted that his cousin had not left a will, thus prompting the call for an inventory of Julian Jorrat’s bienes, or goods, in this sugar cane-growing region. The inventory included tools and animals used in the cultivation of sugar cane, as well as furniture and house wares, on a sizeable property that Julian had leased since 1899. In addition, Pedro testified that his cousin Julian had nearly 30,000 pesos in the bank in San Miguel. The presiding judge assigned guardians to protect Jorrat’s estate and cash assets. In early April 1908, Elias Jorrat approached the provincial government on behalf of the lone heir to Julian’s estate, his mother Nefnefe, who lived in his home village of El Mrouj, Metn district, Mount Lebanon. In order to prove jurisdiction, Elias submitted Julian’s baptismal records from the Maronite Diocese of Mercedes in “Lebanon, Turkey.”

During the succession hearings, a creditor objected to the judge’s declaration naming Nefnefe sole heir to her son’s estate, which forced the provincial Supreme Court to weigh in. The Court ultimately decided in favor of Nefnefe and her local

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100 AGPT, Box 757, File 9, Series C, letter dated November 2, 1907. Julian’s estate was ultimately valued at 42,858 pesos, of which 27,953 was cash. Please see AGPT, Box 757, File 9, Series C, letter dated November 4, 1908.

101 AGPT, Box 757, File 9, Series C, letter dated April 3, 1908. The baptismal documents were submitted in both Arabic and French and were certified by the French consulate in Beirut and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Buenos Aires. It was not until 1910 that Argentina and the Ottoman Empire formalized consular relations. France, for many years, had been the diplomatic conduit between Istanbul and Buenos Aires. In addition, France claimed jurisdiction over the Christian populations in Ottoman territories due to an international concord agreed to in the wake of sectarian violence in Mount Lebanon and Damascus in 1860.
The most important aspect of these proceedings was the protection of Jorrat’s estate by the state institutions. Without heir or citizenship, the law protected Julian Jorrat’s assets until all vested parties could file their claims before a judge. In addition, the court recognized the Arabic-language baptismal record as a legitimate document to decide the fate of Jorrat’s estate.

These previous examples illustrate that, contrary to the conventional historiography, the state was neither entirely prejudicial nor uninterested in the affairs of Arabic-speaking immigrants. In fact, the Argentine state could stand in the place of social networks and protect the interests of an immigrant, whether ill or dead. Furthermore, these social networks tapped into the legal system. In terms of property, immigrants from the Syrian colony trusted the system to function transparently and fairly.

The Syrian colony of Tucumán, however, remained unorganized in comparison to the colonies in Buenos Aires, San Juan, Mendoza and Córdoba. For instance, the community in the capital city of Buenos Aires had created three benevolent aid societies, including one named El Paraíso de los Pobres (Paradise of the Poor), to tend to poor immigrants. The Schamún brothers, under the aegis of their periodical Al-Salām, had opened a free legal and medical clinic for their poor compatriots. The Syrian elite in Tucumán, however, were not able to create similar institutions to help recent arrivals of meager means as had the Spaniards and Italians.


103 “Los árabes en la República,” La Prensa, November 17, 1906.

104 “La colectividad siria en la República,” La Prensa, May 10, 1907.
The inability to organize lasting institutions and the surge of recent immigrants shortly before World War I led directly to the formation of a multi-class social structure within the Syrian colony as well as higher rates of arrest for specific felonies. Over half of the Syrian labor force in Tucumán worked in the commercial sector, principally as merchants and itinerant peddlers, and a Syrian immigrant was more than eight times more likely to be a peddler than the average immigrant. Some worked as clerks for businesses and employees for state institutions, such as the local police force. Yet, recent arrivals had to navigate the insecurity of being an immigrant with insufficient or nonexistent social networks to help deal with their new surroundings. As a result, many worked as menial and unskilled laborers in the urban economy. For example, a Syrian was more than five times likely than the average immigrant to be a shoe shiner.

The statistical data suggests that the experience for those without strong micro-social networks, which facilitated the securing of employment, housing and sustenance, was one of personal insecurity and the likelihood of arrest. Arabic-speaking immigrants were overrepresented in the arrest rates for felony crimes, chiefly aggravated assault and larceny. As Chart 2.7 illustrates, members of the Syrian colony were more than twice as

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105 Censo de la Capital de Tucumán, 40-47. The 1913 census of San Miguel de Tucumán is a tremendous resource to examine the labor force of the Syrian colony. For instance, one-third of the labor force worked in unskilled and menial labor, including Arabic-speaking immigrant women who worked as washerwomen, clothes ironers, and domestic servants. Itinerant peddlers accounted for two-thirds of this labor sector. Interestingly, Arabic-speaking immigrants were more than three times as likely as the average immigrant to be bakers, suggesting access to capital beyond the realm of dry goods commerce. It is important to note that the laborers from the Syrian colony were underrepresented as day laborers, shoemakers and carpenters.

106 Ibid.
likely to be arrested for aggravated assault as a Spaniard, and one and a half times as likely as an Italian. As seen in Chart 2.8, Arabic-speakers were twice as likely as the average immigrant to be arrested for larceny, and more than three times as likely as a Spaniard and four times more likely than an Italian. A portion of the arrests may be a result of targeting by local police forces; however, this cannot be the sole causative factor. It is probable that recent arrivals with a poor understanding of Spanish who peddled or sought work in the cane fields found themselves in dangerous situations that led to violent altercations. Furthermore, high rates of larceny, which suggest a sense of desperation, are likely linked to poverty of the perpetrators, and could become a survival strategy.107

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correspondiente al año de 1909, 146; correspondiente al año de 1910, 114; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1912, 112; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1913, 118.

Chart 2.8. Average Annual Arrest Rates for Larceny, Province of Tucumán, 1908-1913. Source: Anuario correspondiente al año de 1908, 106; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1909, 146; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1910, 114; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1912, 112; Anuario correspondiente al año de 1913, 118.

While higher rates of exogamous marriages suggest a measure of integration and a survival strategy in difficult times, criminality is another expression of personal insecurity associated with the vagaries of a faltering economy, tenuous housing and scarce jobs. Giving further credence to the sense of insecurity and desperation felt by more vulnerable sectors of the Syrian colony, Arabic-speaking immigrants were modestly more likely to be arrested for public intoxication and more than two times more likely to be arrested for the illegal discharge of a firearm than the average immigrant.

Conclusion
The pioneer generation of Arabic-speaking immigrants from Greater Syria included a disproportionate number of people who arrived with capital and merchandise to peddle. This allowed for the accumulation of capital and the establishment of shops that serviced new tastes and desires and acted as nodes for chain migrants. A shift in the immigrant composition at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century sent a greater percentage of people with less capital, less education, and fewer skills. It is also clear that the Syrian colony in Argentina identified strongly with the Ottoman Empire and accepted it as their political identity. Many sectors of the community defended the Ottoman state and celebrated wildly upon the arrival of the Ottoman Consul General in 1910.

In northern Argentina, the infighting among the elites of the Syrian colony fractured the immigrant group and prevented the formation of sustained community organizations. This inability to coalesce coupled with the massive immigration into Tucumán to prevent the formal organization of the community. In spite of this, Syrian merchants became an economic power in the province of Tucumán as the number of merchants and their accumulated wealth grew impressively. Despite attempts by community leaders in Buenos Aires and the Ottoman Consul General to discourage peddling, many immigrants continued to choose this vocation as a way to earn capital.

The fragmentation of the Syrian immigrant community was further exacerbated by the multi-class structure that emerged as a consequence of the local economy, based on seasonal labor servicing the cultivation of sugar cane. Those immigrants who arrived with weak or nonexistent social networks had to fend for themselves and search for
scarce jobs. Many married into local Argentine families, others faced the likelihood of arrest for aggravated assault or larceny. At times, state institutions intervened into the lives of immigrants and replaced social networks that were inadequate to handle the situation.

The global shocks of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire would be a difficult time for the Syrian colony in Tucumán as resources to alleviate the stress of surviving a depression were scarce. In addition, the shared Ottoman political identity shattered as novel politicized identities emerged and threatened to implode the community.

Introduction

The global shocks of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire had a direct and immediate impact on the Arabic-speaking communities in Argentina, especially in the northwestern provinces. The outbreak of conflict in Europe provoked an economic depression in Argentina that deepened the economic malaise of the province of Tucumán. The Arabic-speaking immigrant group utilized a variety of strategies to contend with a fluid socioeconomic environment that featured rising crime and unemployment. World War I and the ultimate fall of the Ottoman Empire, however, provoked a dilemma for this mutual political identity as shared senses of place and association dissolved. This existential crisis forced immigrants to grapple with the question of community, and if there was indeed one. In this space, nationalist ideologies politicized ethno-regional identities in new ways and led to a novel racialized political identity: a fellowship founded on the Arab race. These ideologies created new fault lines within the Syrian colony in Argentina, principally among the politically active cultural elite. As the drama in the homelands played out, a distinctly local, elite-led immigrant identity emerged in the early 1920s - the Syrian-Lebanese (colonia siriolibanesa) - that attempted to mitigate the divisiveness caused by the politics of the homeland and to act as
the voice of the community. Local political events in Tucumán, such as the ascension to the governorship by the Radicals in 1917, further challenged the immigrants’ adaptation in an environment marked by increasingly intense labor unrest.

Distinct social groups in the Tucumán mahjar began to solidify based on vocation by the outbreak of World War I. Merchants and itinerant peddlers accounted for fifty-three percent of the Arabic-speaking labor force in San Miguel de Tucumán, yet there was great disparity in wealth among this group of traders. The commercial houses within the Syrian colony ranged from wholesalers to small shopkeepers. The largest merchants not only acted as brokers for recent immigrants but also established important connections with different sectors of local Argentine society. Many had trade links to both the interior of Tucumán and neighboring provinces. Smaller shopkeepers may have made less money than some of their peers who worked as skilled laborers; however, they carried the prestige, real or imagined, of not performing manual labor.¹ They also represented half of all itinerant peddlers accounted for in the 1913 census of San Miguel de Tucumán.²

¹ José Moya notes a similar distinction within the Spanish immigrant community in Buenos Aires. Moya, Cousins and Strangers, 209.

² Censo de la capital de Tucumán, 40-47. It should be noted that while Akram Khater suggests that peddling provided a way to accumulate wealth in order to send back home, it also allowed for immigrants, in the case of northern Argentina, to accumulate start-up capital to open a general store.
The Syrian literary elite (letrados)\(^3\) in Tucumán organized themselves in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution of July 1908, producing the first Arabic-language periodical in Tucumán on December 1, 1913.\(^4\) A month later, another group of immigrants formed a literary society, and the prominent merchant Asis Nadra, a Greek Orthodox Christian from Homs, became president. This marked the emergence of a group of public intellectuals that would play an important role in defending the community, defining the boundaries of acceptable behavior, and creating internal divisions based upon political transformations in the old country. These intellectuals formed part of a larger network, a transnational Arabophone Republic of Letters, connecting them to peers in São Paulo, New York, Dakar, Paris, Cairo, Beirut and Damascus through the exchange of periodicals and personal correspondence. Many engaged debates waged in the Arabic press across the Americas as new fault lines over the future of their homelands emerged during the prosecution of World War I.

\(^3\) Similar to what Angel Rama noted for Latin American writers, Syrian intellectuals viewed themselves as agents of social change for the old country and defenders of the community in the mahjar. Jens Hanssen has observed a similar role for intellectuals in Beirut in the late nineteenth century. See Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Jens Hanssen, “Public Morality and Marginality in fin-de-siècle Beirut,” *Outside in: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East*, Eugene Rogan, Editor, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 183-211.

\(^4\) The Young Turk Revolution of July 24, 1908 was a civil-military coup that restored the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, effectively making the Ottoman Empire a constitutional monarchy, and marked the beginning of the Second Constitutional Era. Shortly thereafter, multiparty elections were held that featured political parties from the Arab provinces which sent politicians to the Ottoman parliament. See Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
The contraction of the economy amplified the social dislocation experienced by these immigrants as they suffered because of their weaker micro-social networks, the lack of immigrant social aid institutions, and a dearth of state welfare institutions. The resulting economic distress exacerbated class disparities within the community. Less successful merchants and more vulnerable members of the colony, such as peddlers, washerwomen, day laborers, and farm hands, occupied a precarious position in local society. Adding housewives, students, and those not having a profession, this group of people represented more than fifty percent of the Syrian colony.\(^5\) In an environment of economic instability and broad social dislocation, many committed crimes and fell victims to it. In the quinquenniums 1910-1914 and 1925-1929, one of the two primary reasons for seeking medical attention by Arabic-speakers was “accidents, poisonings, and violence.”\(^6\) Peddling in the interior of Tucumán was also a dangerous enterprise as a reported 131 disappeared on the road.\(^7\) In addition, commercial enterprises folded and itinerant peddlers lost access to goods on consignment, forcing them to compete for jobs in the cane fields.

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\(^5\) *Censo de la capital de Tucumán*, 40-47. Unfortunately, merchants are not divided according to size or specificity, as in wholesale or retail, general goods or hardware store.


\(^7\) Valverde, “Integration and Identity in Argentina,” 317.
A bourgeois elite from the Syrian colony arose in this chaos to become the wealthiest commercial group in the province. Despite their economic success, the local Arabic-speaking elites were always concerned with their position in Argentine society. In 1916 they were confronted by a group of non-elite compatriots who possessed distinctly different notions of politics. The intense social dislocation and political instability in Tucumán illustrated cleavages within the community based upon socioeconomic status. Hence, members of the merchant and cultural elite pleaded for their less successful co-nationals to abstain from the social and political unrest that burdened the province.

World War I furthered the internal distress of the Arabic-speaking collectivity. The famine that ravaged Syria and Lebanon during the war inspired the organization of benevolent aid societies that collected donations and made arrangements for the aid to be delivered in the old country. During the war and especially in the wake of the Ottoman disintegration, competing visions and nationalisms surfaced as the Arabic-speaking community debated and fought among themselves over the future of their homelands and how to participate in life in Argentina. Syrian intellectuals in Tucumán participated in the debates raging in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in the Americas. The Empire’s demise engendered several responses in the Arabic-language press. International political concerns created new fault lines of division within the community in Tucumán that ranged from supporting Lebanese independence to championing an Arab Islamic

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8 The provincial statistical annuals counted value of merchants based on three criteria: the value of property, inventory, and “otros valores,” which included the value of furniture and cash on hand.
Caliphate. These divisive debates ultimately led to the formation in 1921 of a cultural association that advocated a politics of Arab culture.

**Social Networks, Commerce and Crime in a Time of Economic Uncertainty**

The outbreak of hostilities in the Balkans in 1912 led British banks to consolidate their capital, tighten credit and call in loans. Thus, with the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, “British banks [in Argentina] were already under pressure from their London offices and began calling in loans, reducing advances to [their] customers and pressing for remittances…,” thrusting Argentina into depression.\(^9\) Tightening credit markets and the recalling of short- and long-term funds by British banks led to runs on banks in Argentina. Direct foreign investment evaporated at the same time as European markets disappeared with the disruption of international shipping. Unemployment, which was tied directly to foreign financing of infrastructure projects, doubled in 1914 to 13.4 percent, climbed to 17.7 percent in 1916 and peaked at 19.4 percent in 1917. Food prices spiked as inflation soared. The public debt nearly tripled between 1914 and 1918, while real wages had tumbled 37 percent by 1918.\(^10\)

As Argentina responded to the conflict in Europe, Syrians in northern Argentina attempted to adapt to the collapsing economy, evaporating jobs and spikes in interpersonal violence and property crime, as well as confront the future of their homelands in light of the Ottoman Empire’s participation in the Great War on the side of the Central Powers. In such times of distress, microsocial networks were indispensable

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\(^10\) Albert, *South America and the First World War*, 247.
for securing necessities and surviving periods of unrest. These informal interpersonal associations, which could be based upon village or kinship ties as well as economic exchanges, were imbued with power relations and created relationships of dependency. The *shaykhs* (secular leaders) were critical actors here. According to oral testimony, most members of the colony recognized a group of early Arabic-speaking immigrants in Tucumán as *shaykhs*. It was these merchants, many located on the third block of Maipú Street, who offered goods on consignment, floated loans, and acted as intermediaries with the larger society. It is likely that this phenomenon was not simply a transposition of the social order from the old country, but rather recognition of the material success, economic power, and social rank enjoyed by these successful merchants. While some immigrants cultivated relationships with these *shaykhs* and accrued some social cachet among their peers, *shaykhs* could activate these networks to punish a compatriot for perceived transgressions.\(^\text{11}\) Social networks provided a safety net for some immigrants in times of distress, especially where state welfare institutions were weak or nonexistent. The strength of these networks, however, was critical to their successful functioning.\(^\text{12}\)

Social networks in times of distress were strongest and most useful among the established merchant elite. Abraham Budeguer had migrated with his wife Juana to

\(^{11}\) José Cohen-Imach, in conversation with the author, August 2007; Ussama Makdisi, e-mail message to author, April 22, 2008.

\(^{12}\) Please see Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*; Singerman, *Avenues of Participation*; Eva Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la Inmigración en la Argentina*; Samuel L. Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914*. Microsocial networks were crucial in the arbitration of disputes and achieving goals for many immigrants; however, the success of these arrangements was dependent upon their relative strength.
Tucumán near the turn of the century. Before his death in July 1917, his network included Jorge Llobril, Antonio Apud, and David Canz. These men knew Budeguer and his wife while in Mount Lebanon, had attended their wedding in 1890, and were merchants based in San Miguel de Tucumán. Abraham Budeguer had cultivated a friendship with neighbor José C. Posse, a provincial Senator who, after Abraham’s passing, served as provisional administrator of the Budeguer estate until May 1918.

Abraham initially worked as a merchant and later purchased land in the Department of Cruz Alta, bordering the provincial capital, and began to grow sugar cane for the local ingenio. He died with many debts outstanding, principally to the firms of Galip y Eleas, Albaca Hermanos, and Antonio di Lella. The court subsequently confirmed Juana Budeguer as legal administrator of his estate, and the family attempted to repay his debts. After an inventory of property and valuables was completed, Juana petitioned to sell the sugar cane to cover court costs, past debts and the officials’ fees.

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14 AGPT, Caja 752, Expediente 10, Series E, Letter from Javier Usandivaras to Judge, August 29, 1917, Sucesión de Abraham Budeguer. Usandivaras was the attorney for Juana Budeguer.

15 Archivo del Poder Judicial de la Provincia de Tucumán (hereafter APJPT), Registro Público de Comercio, Volume 1, 367; Volume 3, 239. Galip y Eleas and Albaca Hermanos were firms founded by Arabic-speaking immigrants. The former was established in December 1912 and the latter formed in April 1906.

16 AGPT, Caja 752, Expediente 10, Series E, “Autos y Vistas,” December 10, 1917, Sucesión de Abraham Budeguer. The judged declared that the three witnesses would suffice to confirm Juana’s position as widow because “Monte Libano, Turquía… actualmente se encuentra en guerra,” and thus it was unrealistic to compel Juana to secure her marriage certificate.
who participated in the proceedings. Yet, covering all debts in full proved difficult and led to further court proceedings from creditors. In August 1919, David Canz intervened on behalf of the Budeguer family, citing the disastrous results of the sugar cane harvest, and offered to pay the remaining debts. The judge authorized the request and David paid off everything by the end of the month.\footnote{APJPT, Registro Público de Comercio, Volume 2, 42. Canz was a merchant in Tucumán who had a personal relationship with the firm Galip y Eleas. He was formally a partner in a firm with Salomon Galip, a company that also included Antonio Apud and Jorge Llobril as partners. It should be noted that Canz used one of the Budeguer properties as insurance.}

The informal social connections Abraham Budeguer had enjoyed in life saved his family from financial disaster after his death.

Social networks also could work in a punitive fashion. Twenty-five-year-old married merchant Julian Tarraf was accused of stealing merchandise belonging to the firm José Dantur y Hermano.\footnote{The Danturs were a powerful merchant family who were based in Buenos Aires and had opened up a branch office just before the outbreak of World War I. They were prominent members of the Syrian colony’s merchant elite in Tucumán.} In December 1916, the police seized goods at Tarraf’s house and placed him in detention, accused of taking less than $100 pesos, the threshold for a more severe penalty if found guilty. The Danturs were not satisfied and insisted that Tarraf had intended to steal more than $100 pesos worth of merchandise. Tarraf countered that the Danturs gave the goods to him on consignment. The Dantur brothers provided eight additional witnesses from the Syrian colony to testify against their
compatriot. In response, the defense accused these witnesses of giving false testimony. Tarraf was convicted and served seven months and fifteen days.\(^\text{19}\)

The Dantur brothers had four options to pursue a resolution, one internal to the immigrant group and three external. The dispute between Julian Tarraf and the Danturs could not be resolved through internal arbitration.\(^\text{20}\) The three external options involved the Argentine court system. Two possibilities entailed utilizing the commercial courts to compel payment. The final alternative involved the criminal court system. The Dantur family chose to pursue a criminal proceeding, and they activated their informal associations to punish Julian Tarraf. It is likely they utilized their standing to compel peers to testify against Tarraf. In this instance, the court proved to be an arena of disputation that may have been as much about internal power concerns as it was about stolen merchandise. The giving of goods on consignment and the extension of credit to smaller merchants was a long-standing practice among merchants from Greater Syria.

\(^{19}\) APJPT, Juzgado del Crimen, Sentencias 1916 al 1918, September 6, 1917, 293-295. The list of witnesses included Camilo Dantur, Dolores Achi de Debe, Abraham Ched, Amado Simon Tenal, José Chalita, Felipe Baclini, Juan Alabi, Natalio Suarez, and Teresa Morra de Kairuz.

\(^{20}\) Unfortunately for researchers, the records of the criminal proceedings of the Juzgado del Crimen were destroyed per provincial law. The summaries of these proceedings in the volumes of Sentencias, which have only been made available to the public, are all that remain. Boğçu Ergene, an historian of Ottoman legal practices, has noted the limitations of similar types of sources in the Ottoman context. Ergene, informed by anthropological methodologies, has noted how plaintiffs to achieve a desired outcome if extrajudicial mediation failed utilized certain strategies. See Boğçu A. Ergene, \textit{Local Court, Provincial Society and Justice in the Ottoman Empire: Legal Practice and Dispute Resolution in Çankırı and Kastamonu (1652-1744)}, (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
What is clear is that the Danturs were infuriated by Julian Tarraf’s behavior and chose the most extreme course of action to seek a resolution.\textsuperscript{21}

In spite of all the instability during and after the war, Syrian merchants became the wealthiest commercial group in the province. They had cultivated important linkages with local Argentine society and continued to supply and act as brokers for fellow immigrants. In addition, the company towns and burgeoning urban areas that grew in response to the expansion of the sugar industry became “poles of economic attraction.”\textsuperscript{22} Syrian merchants tried to exploit these underdeveloped markets, and in certain cases acted as the catalyst for urban development. For instance, by 1917 the Saad Brothers were key suppliers for the Luisiana sugar mill and Guetas Chebaia provisioned the Lastenia cane factory and its workers.\textsuperscript{23} In 1912, the Fiad brothers opened a branch store near Quilmes, Department of Leales at the train station Palá-Palá, located not far from land the brothers had bought. There, the Fiads grew sugar cane and corn, and their commercial house became the primary distributor for the department. This shop was so successful that the Fiads moved their headquarters from Bella Vista, Famaillá. A nucleus


\textsuperscript{22} María Elena Vela Rios and Roberto Caimi, “The Arabs in Tucumán, Argentina,” 132.

\textsuperscript{23} Schamún, \textit{La Siria nueva}, 130, 211. The Saads relocated to San Miguel de Tucumán in 1919 and would become one of the largest wholesalers in the province and a vendor for the Argentine military. See “Kalim Handor ex contador de la casa Saad Hermanos defraudó a esta en ochenta mil pesos,” \textit{El Orden}, October 31, 1930; APJPT, Registro Público de Comercio, Contratos Mercantiles, “Saad Hermanos,” Vol. 13, 310-313.
of people had settled around the Fiad’s store and, as a consequence, the small town Villa Fiad was born.  

The established and wealthiest merchants of the Syrian colony provided goods for recent arrivals that fanned across the province as itinerant peddlers pushed their wares. These merchants also supplied loans to fellow compatriots to purchase real estate.  

The general solidarity between Syrian merchants and peddlers was critical to the continual rise of this commercial group. In many cases, these social networks had a distinct economic function that provided wholesalers with merchants in search of goods.  

The extension of the railroad and the spur lines to the agricultural zones and sugar mills gave a spatial fix to Tucumán, making it the center of the regional economy and a locus for seasonal labor migration.  

As a result, the evolution of this merchant group and their extensive trade links throughout northwest Argentina increased their importance in the distribution of goods throughout the region. In fact, the largest merchant houses in first

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25 For instance, the firm Albaca Hermanos provided a loan before 1911 to José and Miguel Turbay for the purchase of a building in Villa Alberdi, Departamento de Juan B. Alberdi, Province of Tucumán. See APJPT, Contratos Mercantiles, Registro Público de Comercio, Vol. 9, p. 224, June 8, 1911, Turbay Hermanos, Disolución social.

26 Economic geographers refer to these arrangements as “networks of ethnicity.” See Katharyne Mitchell, “Networks of Ethnicity,” 392-407.

half of the twentieth century became the point of reception and distribution of imported goods for northwest Argentina.\textsuperscript{28}

During World War I, the number of merchants continued to grow despite the instability of the local economy. As immigration to Argentina fell steeply due to the war, it is likely that internal migration produced the growth of merchants. The number of Arabic-speaking merchants in Tucumán doubled from 507 to 1047 between 1914 and 1920. Argentine, French and Italian merchants experienced a decline in numbers, while the Spaniards increased modestly.\textsuperscript{29} Chart 3.1 illustrates that the growth of Syrian merchants, as measured by enlistment with the Public Register of Commerce, followed the economic trend of depression and recovery during and after the war.

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1914 & 1915 & 1916 & 1917 & 1918 & 1919 & 1920 & 1921 & 1922 \\
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\# of merchants & 0 & 10 & 10 & 10 & 10 & 20 & 30 & 40 \\
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\textsuperscript{28} Hugo Luis Ponsati, \textit{Aportes para una reseña de la colectividad árabe Tucumána}, (Tucumán: Sociedad Sirio Libanesa de Tucumán, 1975), 17.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1914}, (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1916), 253; \textit{Anuario de estadística correspondiente al año 1920}, 278.
The rise in wealth of Syrian merchants, measured in real estate, inventory and cash, is the most striking characteristic of the period. These merchants experienced a massive spike in capital of almost 300 percent between 1919 and 1920, primarily in merchandise. Argentines, Italians and the French enjoyed modest growth. Spaniards lost value in the six-year period. While inconclusive, internal migration of Arabic-speaking immigrants to Tucumán from elsewhere in Argentina is likely a causative factor to explain the explosion in wealth. The number of merchants increased by more than twenty-five percent between 1919 and 1920; however, less than forty are noted in the Public Register of Commerce.

Chart 3.2. Wealth of Merchant Groups. Province of Tucumán, 1914-1920. Source: Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1914, 253; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1915, 222; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1917 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1918), 264; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1918 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de
The bulk of the Arabic-speaking commercial group’s wealth lay in merchandise. The cash value of their buildings was always less than those of the Argentine, Spanish and Italian merchants. They did not surpass the Spanish for third place among worth of buildings until 1920; the same year the Arabic-speaking merchants expanded their inventory’s value. The causative factor cannot be determined with the available data; however, it is likely a corollary to the surge of new merchants in the province. It is probable that these merchants arrived with substantial capital from previous business ventures or were underwritten by firms based in Buenos Aires. In addition, it is likely that some itinerant peddlers made the transition to shopkeeper.

Chart 3.3. Wealth of Merchandise in Stock, Province of Tucumán, 1914-1920. Source: *Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1914*, 253; *Anuario de Estadística*
correspondiente al año de 1915, 222; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1916 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1917), 236; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1917, 264; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1918, 264; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1919, 291; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1920, 278.

Chart 3.4. Wealth of Merchant Real Estate, Province of Tucumán, 1914-1920. Source: Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1914, 253; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1915, 222; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1916, 236; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1917, 264; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1918, 264; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1919, 291; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1920, 278.

In the unstable economic situation of World War I Tucumán, Syrian merchants utilized their social network to further their business interests, and they continued to grow in numbers and wealth. This emergence as a powerful and coherent commercial force also had important consequences with local Argentine society. Certain members from
the immigrant community contributed to elite social organizations and joined local cultural institutions. For instance, Asis and Nagib Nadra, Greek Orthodox Christians from Homs (Syria), started donating money to the Sociedad de Beneficencia de Tucumán by 1921. In addition, Syrians in Tucumán began joining key cultural institutions such as the Sociedad Sarmiento in the provincial capital and the Biblioteca Mitre in Monteros. These societies were important nodes of sociability and, in the case of the Sociedad Sarmiento, a venue for the political and cultural elite of the province. While it is unclear who exactly from the immigrant group joined these institutions, it is certain that these institutions provided Arabic-speaking immigrants with access to the provincial elite. Syrian merchants grappled with local realities and attempted to achieve goals, meet needs, and accumulate wealth, some of whom did this very well.

Strategies of Survival and Adaptation

As work in the cane fields disappeared, non-felony violent crime in the provincial capital of San Miguel de Tucumán surged to seven times the level of Buenos Aires.

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32 Since these institutions required dues, it is likely that merchants, or those who had a professional job, were the ones who associated with these organizations.
Homicides also increased between 1917 and 1920.\textsuperscript{33} The local press alternated between demands for increased police vigilance and resignation at the dismal state of personal security as a general sense of disorder emerged. For instance, in the winter of 1915 the editors of *El Orden*, a Tucumán daily, declared they had called, “on more than one occasion,” for an augmentation of police funds to put more officers on the streets of the provincial capital.\textsuperscript{34} For the editors, local political leaders neglected public security, which “should constitute one of the primordial governmental concerns.” In fact, thugs committed acts of robbery with impunity in the city’s most central neighborhoods. Underscoring their criminal audacity, the editors noted the theft of provincial legislators Antonio Correa and Juan Brígido Terán’s *medallas de diputado*, or legislator’s badge.\textsuperscript{35}

Arabic-speaking immigrants in Tucumán utilized a variety of strategies to adapt to worsening economic conditions. One of the most compelling tactics was marrying into local Argentine families. Syrian males were more than twice as likely to marry an Argentine woman as were other immigrant males between 1914 and 1917.\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{34} “Vigilancia policial,” *El Orden*, July 16, 1915.

\textsuperscript{35} “Vigilancia policial,” *El Orden*, July 16, 1915. Terán was also the founder of the National University of Tucumán.

\textsuperscript{36} Data collected from the corresponding years of the *Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán*. In calculating the rate, the immigrant population numbers were taken from the 1914 census and used as a constant.
A variety of reasons likely explain this motivation. Firstly, Arabic-speaking men outnumbered Syrian women four to one. With a severe disparity in gender numbers, opportunities for endogamous marriage were difficult.\textsuperscript{37} It is clear from the data though that a lack of Arabic-speaking brides was not the sole factor for exogamous marriages. Secondly, immigrants with weaker or non-existent social networks could potentially

\textsuperscript{37} Some of the more successful merchants that arrived unmarried in Argentina later returned to their country of origin to procure brides. Professor Elena Albaca de Fares, in conversation with the author, San Miguel de Tucumán, July 4, 2007.
ameliorate their situation by marrying into an Argentine family. To be sure, the elite families of Tucumán were closed to this generation of immigrants; however, families from the middling and working classes did offer certain benefits to young men. For instance, Mohammed Haidar, a Muslim immigrant from Mount Lebanon, arrived alone in 1914 in Ledesma, Jujuy province at the age of fourteen. He eventually married into a local family and became a production chief for the local sugar factory. Finally, marrying into a local family also suggested finality to the migratory experience; a decision to remain in Argentina. In sum, matrimony with an Argentine woman was an option utilized by an increasing percentage of Syrians in Tucumán during the economic crises in the second half of the decade.

In comparison to society at large, the criminal arrest rates of Syrian immigrants were double the provincial average. The arrest rates of larceny and aggravated assault

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38 Salma Haidar, President of the Islamic Center of Jujuy, in discussion with the author, July 2007.

39 Marrying local women also had a potential negative impact among certain circles of the Syrian colony. Gabriel Candalaft, who was a member of the Syrian colony’s intellectual elite, married a lower class Argentine woman who was born out of wedlock and fatherless (an hija natural) in Garmendia, Tucumán. According to oral testimony, elite Syrian women ridiculed his wife Rosaura for being from this socioeconomic class. In addition, marrying a local woman did not always equate to permanent residency in Argentina. For instance, Maria Braida sought help from the Argentine Vice Consulate in Beirut after she traveled to Mount Lebanon in search of her husband. Upon finding him in his home village, she was shocked to find out that her husband was Muslim and not Christian as he told her. Personal interview with Victor and David Massuh, Buenos Aires, September 2007; Archivo de Cancillería, Box 1277, Folder 26.

for the province between 1914 and 1916 were 9.7 and 22.4 crimes per 10,000 inhabitants respectively, whereas the rates for those in the Tucumán mahjar were 28.9 and 32.1 respectively. In short, a Syrian was more than twice as likely to be arrested for larceny as the average immigrant in Tucumán and twice more likely to be arrested for aggravated assault than a Spaniard or an Italian. Several reasons explain the overrepresentation of this immigrant group.

Chart 3.6. Average Annual Arrest Rates for Aggravated Assault, Province of Tucumán, 1908-1916. Source: *Anuario de Estadísticas correspondiente al año de 1908*, 106; *Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán*. Unfortunately, assessing the victims of these crimes is not possible with the data from the statistical annuals. As such, there is a certain flattening of the data.

41 Aggregate numbers fail to fully grasp the percentage of the populations perpetrating such acts because of the difference in population sizes. See Randolph Roth, “Guns, Murder, and Probability: How Can We Decide Which Figures to Trust?,” *Reviews in American History*, 35 (2007): 165–175.
Firstly, in comparison to the French, Italian, and Spanish, Syrians were recent arrivals in Tucumán. Secondly, they remained less organized than the other primary immigrant groups and segmented along socioeconomic class lines. Thirdly, the lack of social institutions and weak or nonexistent microsocial networks, coupled with a local...
environment of scarce jobs, rising costs, and social unrest, created a situation where theft, among other criminalized activities, could become a survival strategy. Put another way, “delinquent violence thus manifest[ed] the implicit violence of structural exclusion.”\textsuperscript{42}

For those immigrants whose interpersonal associations were tenuous or lacking, economic instability left many exposed.

**Non-elite Politics and Elite Responses**

Although Tucumán’s sugar industry serviced the domestic market, it suffered greatly during the war. Crop failures, such as the one in 1916, demonstrated the delicate nature of the economy. A central feature of the sugar industry was its reliance on contractual labor, which in times of economic distress provoked “acute social polarizarization.”\textsuperscript{43} Unlike labor in cities such as Buenos Aires and Rosario, the workers in the cane fields remained unorganized and could rarely fight for better wages and sanitary work conditions. Jobs were scarce. Arabic-speaking immigrants who were not established commercially had to fight for jobs as credit lines dried up. As such, many sought temporary work in the cane fields while their more successful countrymen attempted to ride out the economic situation.

In the winter of 1916, more than 500 Arabic-speaking immigrants from Tucumán agreed to contractual terms to work in cane fields at Ledesma, Jujuy province. On the afternoon of June 12, these immigrants initiated a labor strike against the cane factory for breach of contract and dodgy business practices. The workers accused the management


\textsuperscript{43} Albert, *South America and the First World War*, 64.
of under weighing the cut sugar cane, which was the basis of their pay scale. In addition, the workers felt aggrieved by the firm’s rule requiring them to use *valeles*, or coupons, as currency in the general stores on the plantation in place of legal tender. As such, the workers demanded their wages up to that point, and sought to renegotiate the work contract for higher wages. Otherwise, they would not travel to the fields and cut cane. The facility’s manager, Arthur Bodewig, was incensed. He yelled at the workers claiming he had done them a favor by bringing them from Tucumán where they had been starving.

According to worker testimony, Bodewig promised the workers he would return shortly with a satisfactory solution. He arrived a quarter of an hour later, after having organized a group of irregular security forces armed with Mauser rifles, declaring that the laborers should quit the sugar fields. The workers, realizing the seriousness of the situation, asked to settle accounts because they had no money for the train fare to Tucumán and did not want to leave until they received their earned wages. Upon Bodewig’s command, the security forces opened fire on the protesting immigrants,

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44 Marcelo Lagos notes in 1910 workers at Ledesma earned 1.50 to 1.80 pesos per 1,000 kg of cut and peeled cane. According to worker testimony, the 1916 contract stated that each worker would receive $1.80 for every 1,000 kg. The contract covered 700 laborers, “árabes en su mayoría.” See Marcelo Lagos, “Conformación del mercado laboral en la etapa de despegue de los ingenios Jujeños (1880-1920),” *Estudios sobre la historia de la industria azucarera argentina*, Volume II, Daniel Campi, Editor, (Jujuy: Universidad Nacional de Jujuy, 1992), 71; “El asunto del ingenio Ledesma,” *La Gaceta*, June 17, 1916.

instantly killing four. The remaining workers scrambled to the train station where they spent the night awaiting transport out of Ledesma.46

As the news of the events began to emerge, the governor of Jujuy deployed the Argentine Infantry’s 20th Regiment to reestablish order and dispatched an investigative judge from the Superior Tribunal de Justicia to conduct an investigation. The incident made national headlines in both the Spanish- and Arabic-language press and provoked calls for labor reforms from leading politicians. Leaders from the Radical and Socialist parties, in addition to Arabic-speaking elites in Buenos Aires, sent telegrams to the federal Ministry of Interior demanding an investigation. The acting Ottoman Consul General also demanded an official inquiry from the Argentine Foreign Ministry. In response to the public outcry and political pressure, the Ministry of the Interior intervened and sent an investigator from the National Department of Labor to assay the situation. During a massive rally held in San Salvador, Jujuy’s capital, Arif Yapur, an Arabic-speaking immigrant, gave a speech in Spanish, which was much applauded by the assembled crowd, condemning the aggression against the workers and called for the responsible to be held accountable.47 This is one of the first examples of formal political activism from a member of this collectivity in northern Argentina.48

46 Ibid.

47 “La masacre de obreros en el ingenio de Ledesma, La Vanguardia, June 19, 1916; “Los sucesos del Ingenio Ledesma,” La Gaceta, June 17, 1916; Archivo de Cancillería, Caja 1637, Expediente 1, letter from Ottoman Consul General to Argentine Minister of Foreign Relations, June 20, 1916; Archivo Histórico de Jujuy, Año 1916, Caja 2, “Solicita datos sobre los hechos ocurridos con los otomanos.” The official reports about the bloody events in Ledesma lay blame squarely on the workers. The archival and print materials show no resolution was reached and progressive labor regulations did not
The following month, the elites from the Arabic-speaking collective responded by conspicuously participating in the installation of the statue of Argentina’s revolutionary hero Martín Güemes in Salta, capital of the province of the same name. This event, held on July 9, 1916, marked the centenary of the declaration of independence by the United Provinces of the River Plate (Argentina). On the same day, La Nación, a leading Argentine daily, published a sympathetic portrait of Alejandro and Wadi Schamún, editors of the Arabic-language daily al-Salām, and their efforts to help integrate the Arabic-speaking community along elite Argentine wishes.49

Throughout the remainder of the war and into the immediate postwar period, Tucumán experienced tremendous social and political instability. The year 1917 alone witnessed the ascension to the governorship by Juan Bautista Bascary of the Radical Party, his subsequent closing of the provincial legislature, his removal from office by federal intervention, and finally his return to office following a final report by the Interventor, the legal term for the federally appointed head of local government. In addition, Bascary’s period of rule also transpired in a climate of difficult social problems:

48 The labor strike by the Arabic-speaking workers was not part of a larger labor movement. It was a spontaneous and ephemeral event that was a product of specific local circumstances.

abject poverty marked by frequent strikes and class conflicts. The situation was so fluid that Nagib Baaclini, an immigrant from Mount Lebanon who published an influential bilingual newspaper entitled Şada al-Sharq/El Eco de Oriente (Echo of the Orient), called for a clear delineation between commerce and politics. He reminded merchants from the Syrian colony that men of many different political opinions formed their clientele and persuasions and that it was impossible to please everyone. Baaclini concluded that the best policy was to avoid the upheaval at all cost. As Arabic speakers in Tucumán navigated economic instability and social unrest, the politics of their homeland would be a source of great internal conflict that threatened to irreparably split the Syrian colony.

**The Ottoman Collapse and the Rise of the Syrian Cultural Elite in Tucumán**

For Arabic-speaking immigrants in Argentina, the competing loyalties of regional identification, national loyalty, religious affinity, and village origin created intense strains during the transformative events of World War I. The famine that devastated Greater Syria during the war provoked a mobilization of this immigrant community as they collected monies to remit to the old country in the hope of helping the victims of war and deprivation. The catastrophe of famine and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the

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51 “Comercio y político,” Şada al-Sharq (San Miguel de Tucumán), October 7, 1917.

52 While estimates vary, it is accepted that between 300,000 and 450,000 people in Greater Syria died from famine and disease during World War I. For contextual purposes, on the eve of the Great War the population of the Ottoman provinces of
Levant provoked a fluid environment in the River Plate where symbols took on new, at times fleeting, meanings as Syrians in Argentina struggled to come to terms with the severe transformational events affecting their homeland. The emergence of competing nationalisms among the Syrian cultural elite throughout the Americas initiated a visceral debate, which included the communities in Argentina.\(^5^3\)

The transformations in the homeland coincided with the emergence of an organized cultural elite in the Tucumán mahjar. These intellectuals used new technologies and services such as the telegraph and the recently standardized international mail service to create shared frames of references and a sense of interconnectivity that were readapted and reformulated in the particular local contexts, yet fostered a sense of a pan-Arabic-speaking community. Many Syrian intellectuals were personally invested in the debates surrounding the homeland, and they became defenders of the community who used their periodicals to condemn mistreatment as well as define and disseminate a set of acceptable behaviors for their compatriots.

\(^5^3\) During the war, Greater Syria suffered a prolonged famine (1915-1918), witnessed the Great Arab Revolt (1916-1918), and experienced the fall of Jerusalem (1917) and Damascus (1918). With the taking of Damascus, Faisal – the son of Hussein, the Sherif of Mecca, and leader of the Great Arab Revolt – was installed as king on October 1, 1918. The next two years were spent fighting European imperial designs; however, the Versailles Conference (1919) granted France a mandate over Greater Syria. France militarily rolled through Beirut on the way to Damascus, winning the ultimate battle against Faisal’s troops at Maysaloun (July 1920). King Faisal was deposed, relocated to Iraq and was sworn in as King of Iraq to the sounds of “God Save the King.” France’s mandate over Syria and Lebanon was ratified by the League of Nations in 1922.
In April 1913, Elias Turbay, a merchant and self-styled poet based in the small town of Río Seco, Province of Tucumán, invited Simón Hamati to move his family to Tucumán from Buenos Aires with the promise of a printing press to support his writing. Simón had been publishing a periodical entitled al-İŞr (The Eagle) in the federal capital since January. Elias, al-İŞr’s distributor and authorized agent (wakil) in northern Argentina, promised start-up capital of 15,000 pesos to finance the relocation. Hamati suspended publication and made the move north.

Upon Simón Hamati’s arrival, Elias Turbay met him and his family at the train station, apologizing because he had not been able to arrange the delivery of the printing press yet. Elias explained that the key figure to the venture, Nagib Baaclini, had been away on business. Now back in San Miguel, Nagib Baaclini had to secure the proprietor’s signature of the firm, Getar Hermanos y compañía, for which he worked, to release the investment capital for the printing press. Nagib spent $12,000 pesos for start-up costs, procuring a large amount of Arabic-letters, a big printing press, a smaller machine for printing bulletins, Roman letters of different typesets, and paper, among

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54 Simón Hamati, “Taʾrîkh al- ṣiḥâfa al-ʿarabiyya fî al-Tûkûmân,” al-İŞr, (January 1923), 73. This history of the Arabic press in Tucumán largely informs the following narrative.

55 Simón Hamati originally worked as the Editor of Jirâb al-Hâwi (The Snake Charmer’s Bag), which was first published on August 5, 1912 by the Maronite priest José M. Chaia in Buenos Aires. Simón published his first edition on January 30, 1913. The date in Arabic states February 5, 1913 as date of publication. Additional agents for al-İŞr included Boulos Sama’an, Godoy Cruz, Mendoza province, Argentina; Boutros Georges Farah, Resistencia, Chaco province, Argentina; Saleh Shukri Abu Rizq, Dakar, Senegal; Yousef and Mikhael Lius, Catamarca, Argentina; and Hana Ma’ud, Quilmes, Buenos Aires province. See al-İŞr, January 20, 1913; Jirâb al-Hâwi, August 5, 1912; Hamati, “Taʾrîkh al- ṣiḥâfa al-ʿarabiyya fî al-Tûkûmân,” al-İŞr (January 1923), 73-74.
other things. Simón Hamati remarked that Baaclini’s efforts were a “noble work,” a service to the community, and linked directly to the welfare and success of the Syrian colony. In addition to the publications of Arabic-language periodicals in Tucumán, which began in 1913, the lettered elite was involved in various forms of literary and cultural activities. By 1920, the Syrian intellectuals in Tucumán, through its body the Journalistic Stimulus Commission (*Lajnat Taʾzīz al-ṣiḥāfa*) called for the establishment the Tucumán Literary League (*al-Rābiṭa al-Adabiyya al-Tūkūmāniyya*) to encourage and cultivate the arts and journalistic endeavors. These efforts initiated an impressive period of cultural flourishing that yielded nine periodicals, theatrical performances, and poetry recitals by 1922.

During World War I, two main schools of thought dominated the Argentine mahjar; one advocated remaining a part of the Ottoman Empire with a federal constitution, and the other lobbied to leave it and create a large Arab confederated nation. In the winter of 1916, Syrians in Argentina established the Ottoman Party (*al-Hizb al-ʿUthmāni*). The platform of the party had six points: to defend the territorial integrity of the empire; to combat ‘internal despotism’; to transform the empire into a ‘confederation of states’ with complete autonomy and free internal elections; to make


57 “Taḥiyya al-ikhlāṣ b-ism al-rābiṭa al-adabiyya al-Tūkūmāniyya,” *al-Saʿāda* (San Miguel de Tucumán), Part 1 (May 1920). Most members of the Journalistic Stimulus Commission were important merchants within the Syrian colony of Tucumán, but also included at least one merchant from Jujuy province. The members consisted of Muslims and Christians.

Arabic an official language like Turkish; to distribute administrative positions proportionally among the cultural groups within the empire; and to use all means necessary to educate the ‘Arab masses’ and prepare them for the elections that would follow the war.\textsuperscript{59} With the appearance of the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottomans, led by Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, some members of the Ottoman Party left to form the Partido Patriótico Árabe (Arab Patriotic Party), joining others who had not been members of the older party. This political entity called for the total independence of all Arab lands and the establishment of a large unified confederation.\textsuperscript{60} In addition to these larger political currents, there was a smaller pro-Lebanese movement that encouraged the role of France as a guarantor of Lebanese independence. The Maronite Lebanese Missionary priests led the movement, performing the role of propagandists and supporters of the French presence in Greater Syria.\textsuperscript{61} Following the establishment of the French Mandate in Greater Syria in 1920, however, the question of Lebanon became the crucial issue that divided the Syrian colony in Tucumán and throughout the Americas.

The Syrian lettered elite in Tucumán was intimately involved in the debates circulating throughout the Americas and engaged the debates on all fronts. Critical to the

\textsuperscript{59} Abderrahman, \textit{Adalid Rioplatense}, 160. The pro-Ottoman circle articulated their position in the periodicals \textit{al-ʿAlam al-ʿUthmānī}, led by Saifuddin Rahal, and \textit{al-Shams}. Saifuddin Rahal was an Egyptian who studied at the premier Islamic institution of learning, al-Azhar in Cairo. He would be a leading voice of the Muslim community in Argentina through the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, he established an Islamic school with curriculum based on the modernist teachings of Jamaleddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, both instructors at al-Azhar. Abduh was Grand Mufti of Egypt from 1899 to 1905.

\textsuperscript{60} Abderrahman, \textit{Adalid Rioplatense}, 160-161.

\textsuperscript{61} Akmir, ‘La inmigración árabe en Argentina (1880-1980),’ 422-431.
propagation of these competing ideologies in northern Argentina was control of the
Arabic printing press. In May 1914, the provincial government seized the Hamati-
Turbay printing press during the estate proceedings of Andrés Getar, who had died in
1910 and was a silent partner in the firm Getar Hermanos y Compañía. The intervention
was an attempt to safeguard the inheritance of Andrés’ heirs because the firm was being
investigated on the suspicion of fraudulent bookkeeping.\textsuperscript{62} The firm was victim to the
nationwide calamity of the financial markets that began in 1913. In the process the police
incarcerated Simón Hamati and Elias Turbay for ten days. A year later they were
exonerated after the case finally reached Tucumán’s Superior Court. Miguel Hadle, a
prominent Syrian merchant in Tucumán, bought the press and then turned over editorial
management of the periodical to José Khoueiry, a Lebanese nationalist and member of
the Lebanese Union, the independence organisation founded in Buenos Aires. José
Khoueiry renamed the publication \textit{al-Waṭan (The Nation)} and began publishing in
September 1915. Simón Hamati accused him of possessing an ‘infatuation’ for all things
French based on France’s historic role as protector of Maronite Catholics. Not everyone
agreed with his positions and this apparently led to a decline in readership and advertising
receipts.\textsuperscript{63}

Antonio Eleas, a Maronite immigrant living in Tucumán, wrote a controversial
essay in response to \textit{al-Waṭan} in October 1915. A well-educated merchant and son of an

\textsuperscript{62} AGPT, Box 860, File 17, Series E, “Contador Interventor al Juez,” May 14,
1914, Sucesión de Andrés Getar.

\textsuperscript{63} AGPT, Sucesión de Andrés Getar, Box 860, File 17, Series E, “Contador
Interventor al Juez,” 14 May 1914; Hamati, “Taʾrīkh al- ʿiḥāfa al-ʿarabiyya fī al-
Tūkūmān,” 75-77.
Ottoman official from Baniyas, Latakia District, his two-part essay in the Tucumán daily
La Gaceta, titled ‘El Líbano’ (‘Lebanon’), was disseminated throughout the Argentine
mahjar and, in testament to its importance, was republished in Nagib Baaclini’s Ṣada al-
Sharq in late 1917. Eleas argued Mount Lebanon had been condemned to uncertainty and
poverty by poor governance and retarded economic development. Nevertheless, the
creation of a network of schools in the nineteenth century had given Mount Lebanon’s
inhabitants access to education and ‘free ideas’. The limitations of sericulture, or raising
silk worms for silk production, partly inspired massive emigration from Mount Lebanon
into the mahjar, principally the Americas. France, in this moment, was viewed as Mount
Lebanon’s savior. The Young Turk Revolution, however, changed the dynamic. For
Eleas, the reopening of the Ottoman parliament and participation by politicians from
Mount Lebanon were acts tantamount to the renunciation of the autonomous privileges
that the area had enjoyed since 1861. Eleas pointed out that various men from prominent
families of Mount Lebanon, such as Emir Emin Arslan, who served as Ottoman Consul to
Argentina from 1910 to 1915, saw their world as part of the Ottoman state.64 In the most
controversial passage, Antonio Eleas proclaimed unequivocally that Lebanon was an
integral part of Syria, and Syria part of the empire. He further critiqued the emphasis on
religion as a point of division among people of the same Arab race.65

64 Turbay, al-Manzumāt al-Durriyya, 53; “El Libano” La Gaceta, October 20,
1915; “El Libano” La Gaceta, October 21, 1915. In introducing the essay, Baaclini, the
editor of Ṣada al-Sharq, declared that, although he did not entirely agree with the Eleas’
arguments, the essay merited continued discussion and debate within the colony. See Ṣada al-Sharq, December 1, 1917.

Antonio Eleas’ declaration is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, he dismissed the notion that Mount Lebanon constituted a separate entity from Greater Syria, and, by extension, that the inhabitants there were different from their compatriots in Beirut, Damascus, or Syria’s Valley of the Christians. Secondly, the author directly challenged the platform of José Khoueiry’s *al-Wātān* by arguing Mount Lebanon was a part of the Ottoman Empire. These sentiments, which were strongest in the Argentine mahjar during the years shortly after the Young Turk Revolution, faded away as the war played out and famine gripped the homeland. Nevertheless, many Syrians desired to remain a part of the Ottoman Empire, a position that transcended religious differences. Thirdly, Antonio Eleas forwarded the notion of a solidarity based upon the idea of a shared Arab race that superseded religious identities. It seems likely that Eleas was influenced by the positivist writings circulating through Argentina at the time. This is one of the earliest instances of a racialist notion of Arab identity to circulate through the community. Finally, Antonio Eleas’ comments remark upon the increasing politicization of religious identities. In the mahjar, the politics of belonging was initially based upon shared cultural norms and socioeconomic status. Religion was one variable among many, but not a fault line of separation. Nevertheless, the emergence of *al-Wātān* and Antonio Eleas’ essay ushered the politics of home and World War I into the daily discussion of Tucumán’s Syrian colony.

At certain moments, the internal politics of the Syrian colony intersected with Argentine public political sentiments. Under President Hipólito Yrigoyen, Argentina maintained a policy of strict neutrality during the World War I in order to facilitate trade
with all belligerents. Imperial Germany’s campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare led to the sinking of the Argentine merchant ship, Monte Protegido, on April 4, 1917. On April 15, 10,000 people demonstrated against the German assault on the Argentine vessel in front of the government house in San Miguel de Tucumán. During the protest, Nagib Baaclini gave a speech in Spanish on behalf of the Syrians in Argentina. Declaring that he and his compatriots were ‘oppressed by the barbarous Turks’, Baaclini harangued the Ottoman Empire, Germany’s ally in the war effort. He commented on the despotism of Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid II and on the failure of the Young Turk Revolution. Nagib Baaclini announced that the Arabs had ‘arisen from their deep slumber’, led by their King, Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, and rejected the attribution of Syrians to the ‘murderous Turk’ ‘Abd al-Hamid. He concluded, ‘Down with the Turks! Long live the Arab Caliphate!’

The idea of establishing an Arab Caliphate in the place of the Ottoman variety appealed to many Syrians in the Argentina, but religious identities were beginning to be politicized unlike anything previously experienced within the colony. It would be a mistake, however, to believe that religious identity necessarily predicted the political ideologies and movements to which one adhered. The politics of belonging in the mahjar did not divide along religious lines before the seminal event of the World War I, and similarly many Christians in the Argentina embraced a racialized Arab identity and

66 Newton, German Buenos Aires, 1900-1933, 49.


68 “Fī Sabīl al-Wājib,” al-ʿNaṣr, no. 3, May 1, 1917, 77. Baaclini’s speech was reprinted in Arabic by al-ʿNaṣr.
supported the idea of a kingdom led by Hussein. Equally fascinating is the venue chosen by Nagib Baaclini. Like Antonio Eleas, Baaclini chose an Argentine forum to engage an internal debate of the Syrian colony. Claiming to speak for the community at large, Baaclini repudiated the Ottoman state and, by proxy, those who still supported the government in Istanbul. And he did it in front of thousands of Argentines.

The debate that Nagib Baaclini stirred in this public manner was contentious and provoked violent confrontations. Similar to the Arabic press in the United States, where ‘talk of compromise turned to talk of confrontation, separation, and full-fledged independence’, the debates over the political future of the Levant reached a fever pitch in Buenos Aires and Tucumán as the war proceeded apace.69 The editorial board of *al-ʿAlam al-ʿUthmānī (The Ottoman Standard)* in Buenos Aires argued on February 28, 1917, ‘We are Arabs. But we are Ottomans before anything else. Our [position] is related… [to] the principles of the Ottoman Constitution’.70 Yet, that same day, *al-Mursal (The Missionary)*, a highly respected periodical produced by Maronite priests in Buenos Aires, published an urgent call to form a ‘General Syrian Society’ that would lead the independence movement. Interestingly, this announcement specifically included Lebanese as a group within the larger Syrian body politic.71

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70 Quoted in Akmir, “La inmigración árabe en Argentina,” 421.

of al-Mursal, al-ʿAlam al-ʿUthmānī, al-Shams (The Sun), and Simon Hamati’s al-Naṣr became acerbic in tone and also involved Arab nationalists based in São Paulo, Brazil.\footnote{See “al-Fakāha, aw Sayf al-Dīn Raḥāl,” al-Naṣr, no. 3, May 1, 1917; “Ila al-ʿAlam al-ʿUthmānī,” al-Naṣr, no. 6, June 15, 1917.}

These political movements amplified the sectarian differences within the collective as Christians were referred to as disloyal and enemies of Islam. In late May and early June 1917, al-Mursal published a six-part series that examined a critical question within the Argentine mahjar: Are Syrians Turks?\footnote{“al-Suriyūn wa al-Atrak,” al-Mursal, May 23, 26, 30, June 2, 9, 1917.} In an important critique, the essay’s author Jad Warour claimed that the Ottoman state’s greatest injustices were dividing the population into Turkish Muslims and everybody else and giving the Turkish Muslims the important administrative and military positions. As a result, Turkish Muslims kept faith in the central government. Warour’s essay made that case that Syrians are indeed different and that “Syrians should work for Syrians.”\footnote{“al-Suriyūn wa al-Atrak,” al-Mursal, June 2, 1917. This critique, which is based on perceived policy decisions of the Young Turk regime known as the Turkicization of the Ottoman state, is strikingly similar to the critique by Yubran Massuh, who was based in Tucumán, in 1925. Massuh recollected that it was ultimately bad policy that never allowed the Arab populations to produce “national feelings” for the Ottoman Empire. Please see “Suʿāl wa jawābuhu,” al-Ikhāʾ (San Miguel de Tucumán), 11 (June 1925), 2-5. For a revisionist study of the Turkification argument, see Kayali, Arabs and Young Turks.} In response, al-ʿAlam al-ʿUthmānī proclaimed on June 19, 1917, “the separatist savages are immersed in complete ignorance. They oppose the current government, a government that is
formed by the most valiant men of the East.” The conflict in the papers manifested into violence on the street. Following two weeks of violent street demonstrations among the Syrian colony in Buenos Aires, the acting Ottoman Consul General dispatched a letter to the interim Argentine Foreign Minister demanding that the local authorities prohibit the flying of the Lebanese Union’s flag from particular buildings owned or inhabited by members of the association. Pointing out that this group was a separatist organisation, the Ottoman Consul General reminded his counterpart that Mount Lebanon remained an Ottoman territory and listed the addresses perpetrating the offense. The confrontations in the newspapers and at street rallies ultimately led to the pro-Ottoman community to quit the ‘barrio de los turcos’ and relocate to Calle Venezuela.

While homeland politics were creating crises within the Syrian colonies across Argentina, Jamil Mardam (a Muslim from Damascus and future Syrian Prime Minister) and Dr. César Lakah (a Greek Catholic Syrian and French citizen) led a recruiting mission for the Paris-based Syrian Central Commission, arriving in Argentina in November 1917. This organization was made of Syrians living in Paris, received state funds from France, sought the liberation of Syria under French protection, and pursued donations and volunteers from the Syrian émigré communities in the Americas. This mission raised 100,000 francs and a group of volunteers from the communities in Brazil, and an additional twenty recruits from the colony in Montevideo. The mission, however,

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76 Archivo Histórico de Cancillería, Bobrik to Pueyrredón, Caja 1691, Expediente 7, July 30, 1917.

did not achieve the same success in Argentina. The envoys met immediate resistance from the Lebanese Union, which opposed the goal of a unified Syria, bristled at the absence of a Maronite on the mission, and launched a propaganda campaign against the envoys. As a result, Mardam and Lakah focused on the northwestern colonies; however, the Maronites there resisted collaborating with Greek Orthodox (who were mostly from province of Damascus), the Melkites, the Armenians, the Druzes and Muslims.\textsuperscript{78}

In this political maelstrom, Syrian intellectuals in Tucumán established new periodicals. Said Estofan joined Simón Hamati, who had begun to publish \textit{al-Naşr} again in April 1917, in forming a business that would buy the press from Miguel Hadle. Along with Nagib Baaclini, the three bought the printing press from Hadle for $4,500 pesos and shortly thereafter launched the influential periodical \textit{Ṣada al-Sharq} in October 1917.\textsuperscript{79} As \textit{Ṣada al-Sharq} began to solidify its position in the colony, Nagib Baaclini and Simón Hamati hired the young José Rechmani, an immigrant from Mount Lebanon who had previously resided in San Pedro de Jujuy. José Rechmani originally moved to Tucumán to work as a hairdresser; however, he quickly moved into printing and would publish at least four different periodicals before his untimely death in the early 1930s from typhoid fever.\textsuperscript{80}


\textsuperscript{79} Hamati, “Ta’rīkh al-şihāfa al-‘arabiyya fī al-Tūkūmān,” \textit{al-Naşr} (January 1923), 78. \textit{Ṣada al-Sharq} was the first periodical from the Arabic-speaking communities in Iberoamerica to be published in both Arabic and Spanish, and ran from 1917 to 1952.

\textsuperscript{80} Hamati, “Ta’rīkh al-şihāfa al-‘arabiyya fī al-Tūkūmān,” 77; David and Víctor Massuh, in conversation with the author, Buenos Aires, September 2007.
Mobilizing the Community to Aid the Homeland

In addition to battles waged in the Arabic-language newspapers in Argentina, individuals and groups utilized several strategies to support their communities in the old country. For instance, the Lajnat Iʿāna Mankūbī Suriyya wa Lubnān (Committee for Aid to the Victims in Syria and Lebanon), which was headquartered in Buenos Aires and headed by Antonio Arida, 81 secured in June 1917 an arrangement with the Spanish government to remit money to their homelands. The Spanish monarchy agreed to send money from Spanish Embassy in Buenos Aires to either the Spanish mission in Istanbul or to its consulate in Jerusalem. 82

Syrians in the northern provinces also raised and collected relief money. Merchants in Catamarca established a branch office and sent $300 pesos to the central office in Buenos Aires for remittance to the old country. 83 In Tucumán, the Syria Commission had raised more than 6,000 pesos by April 1916, due in large part to the efforts of Esber Nasīf and Nakhla Asad al-Helu raising funds from Arabic-speaking merchants in the interior of Tucumán. 84 In addition, merchants in San Pedro de Jujuy

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81 Antonio Arida was a prominent member of the Syrian colony in Buenos Aires who led the Syrian-Ottoman Commission and organized a party on September 8, 1908 to celebrate the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution. “La Constitución Otomana: la demostración de anoche,” La Nación, September 9, 1908.


organized a benevolent aid society. As late as 1919, the Lebanese Society for Mutual Aid, located in the province of San Juan, still remitted money to the Maronite Church for further aid distribution. Despite the economic instability in Argentina and competing nationalisms circulating throughout the Argentine mahjar, the elite Syrian merchants had the resources and connections to raise relief funds and seemingly secure their transfer. This emphasis on politics in the homeland and the welfare of distant family members came at the expense of the welfare of the poorest and most vulnerable members of the Syrian colony in Tucumán. This lack of communal aid associations would provide an entry point for Syrian women to create charity organizations by the middle of the 1920s. These organizations provided a space for women to engage in internal community deliberations and solidify linkages to larger Tucumán society.

**Political Exhaustion and the Culturalist Movement**

The beginning of the new decade witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and fall of King Faisal in Damascus. The 1920s were volatile for those immigrants who kept close watch over the events in their homelands. For Arab nationalists, the short-lived monarchy of Faisal I in Damascus was the realization of their dreams and political

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86 Maronite Patriarchate Archives (Bkerke, Lebanon), Howaik Papers, Box 73, Letter to Patriarch Howaik from Lebanese Society for Mutual Aid, June 23, 1919. This organization, which was founded in June 1899, was originally named the Syrian Society of Mutual Aid; however, in the letter located in the archives the word “Syria,” both in Arabic and Spanish, is scratched out. The Arabic word is replaced with “Lebanese.”

activities in Argentina. France’s forceful deposing of Faisal in July 1920 and the subsequent creation of the State of Greater Lebanon, which would become the French-dependent Republic of Lebanon in 1926, were critical events for Lebanese nationalists. In addition, Argentina received dissident intellectuals from these newly formed states during the early years of the French Mandate, which was ratified by the League of Nations in 1922.

In spite of all the political identities that emerged, the immigrants in the Argentine mahjar began to establish organizations and periodicals that shied away from the issues that divided the community. For instance, young intellectuals formed the United Youth (al-Shabība al-Muttaḥida) in San Miguel de Tucumán on June 4, 1921. This group held public events, published a newspaper, and staged plays. Members of the United Youth utilized the printing press to further their mission. In January 1922, Gabriel Candalaft and Wadi Hadla, after speaking with and receiving the collaboration of Nagīb Baaclini, launched the monthly literary review al-Hadiqa (The Garden). In the opening editorial, the directors declared

> When all the American mahjar newspapers harped on politics, especially religion and politics, each newspaper considered a policy to be the correct one for the nation and the homeland (al-umma wa al-watān), [and supported it] with proofs and evidence. Then, [each newspaper] announced its opinion to the people. [One newspaper] proclaims that Lebanon must be completely independent, another will proclaim that Lebanon should join Syria and unite the two countries, another supports occupation, and many others [support] right and wrong ideas about religion and politics… As a result, both Syrians and Lebanese floundered together in darkness, confused which policy to listen to and which one to join.88

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The editors suggested the inability to coalesce around a policy that would be satisfying to all concerned was a product of poor national education. As a pedagogical tool, the editors viewed novels as the “first school” and the “true way to reach the summit of civilization.”

In short, the proposed literature to be published would inspire love for the homeland and evade the realm of divisive politics. The presence of Baaclini on the editorial board is interesting because he would become a supporter of France and its mission in Lebanon. Nevertheless, his call for cooling down the political rhetoric among the collective must have carried some weight and, in the very least, exemplifies the concerns of leaders of the Arabic-speaking collective in Tucumán.

In the inaugural edition of the organization’s periodical, also named al-Shabība al-Muttaḥida, the association declared unequivocally that they would neither “enter the doors of politics” nor “plunge into the ‘religious issues.’” These leaders, instead, would focus on the issues that weakened the unity and solidarity of those in Tucumán mahjar. The periodical featured articles on literature, history, society, and research on commercial issues for the general benefit of the community. The intentional avoidance of religion and politics provides a glimpse into the internal debates surrounding the politics of belonging and the stresses that threatened to fragment the Syrian colony.


92 Ibid.
Conclusion

The global shocks of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire inflamed the worsening economic situation in Argentina. In the northern province of Tucumán, Syrians contended with the contraction of the sugar industry, evaporating jobs, acute social unrest, and intense personal insecurity. Immigrants responded in a variety of ways to achieve goals and meet needs based upon the strength of their social networks and class identity. The merchant class grew in size and wealth, and by 1920 Syrian merchants were collectively the wealthiest in the province. In addition, Syrian merchants and intellectuals joined key Argentine cultural institutions that provided important linkages to Argentine social elites.

Vocational and class identities informed the strategies of survival in this period of economic turbulence, social unrest and political instability. The immigrants with less secure social networks were left exposed to the vagaries of local conditions. Immigrants married into Argentine families in increasing numbers and rate. At the same time, non-elite immigrants in Tucumán were more likely to be arrested for aggravated assault and larceny in comparison to Spanish and Italian immigrants. The social networks for many Syrian immigrants were underdeveloped or weak and could not perform the roles necessary to ameliorate the situation in a turbulent historical moment. In addition, the merchant and cultural elites faced a group of non-elites who increasingly had different notions of political participation, which was exacerbated by their concern with homeland politics and welfare.
World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire provoked an existential crisis for the Syrian colony, leading to the dissolution of a shared sense of community. The emergence of politicised ethno-regional and racialized identities among the Syrian colonies in Argentina was brought about by transformations in the home country. Indeed, the Sultan’s subjects in Argentina had shared a broad based Ottoman political identity; however, the war created a space where Syrian intellectuals in Tucumán and Buenos Aires published periodicals disseminating competing nationalist discourses and separatist movements. These debates, which occasioned internecine violence in Argentina, situated Syrians into an Arabophone Republic of Letters that connected them to peers throughout the Americas and in the homeland. This shared imagined space gave immigrants in Argentina a stake in the destiny of their homeland and the opportunity to fashion anew a sense of place and community in Argentina. In addition, wealthier Syrians in Argentina mobilized the community to raise relief funds for those in Greater Syria suffering from famine, seemingly at the expense of attending to and caring for their compatriots struggling in Tucumán.

By the 1922 election of Radical Octaviano Vera to Tucumán’s governorship, the Syrian colony had emerged as a key merchant force and a growing political power. In addition, new links to the provincial state emerged and certain Syrian immigrants aspired to public office. The Great Syrian Revolt (1925-1927) would again thrust the politics of home into the internal debates of the community. In beginning of the decade the Syrian colony, now increasingly referred to as the Syrian-Lebanese colony (colonia siriolibanesa), in San Miguel de Tucumán finally organized with the establishment of the

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Sociedad Sirilibanesa de Tucumán (Syrian-Lebanese Society). The Syrian lettered elite continued to publish periodicals, defend the community, and set out to establish a set of behavioral norms for their countrymen.
Chapter 4: Family, Insecurity, and Community Politics: Syrian-Lebanese Immigrants in 1920s Tucumán

Arabic-speakers in Tucumán and elsewhere in northwestern Argentina confronted issues related to the establishment of French colonial states in Lebanon and Syria, and continued to negotiate the provincial political instability and economic stagnation during the 1920s. At the onset of the 1920s, the Arabic-speakers began referring to themselves as the Syrian-Lebanese colony, thus distinguishing among themselves for the first time Syrians from Lebanese in the sense of political national identity. Even these identities remained unstable as debates circulated around the utility and wisdom of French control over the nascent states. Hence, politics in the old country had a direct impact on the formation and maintenance of community institutions in the New World. Merchant and intellectual elites of the immigrant community attempted to remove the various political discourses and nationalist ideologies seeping into the daily discourses. Instead of advocating a particular political ideology, these elites advocated a politics of cultural unity that eschewed the divisions of religion and novel political identities.

At the same time, these immigrants had to navigate the economic instability resulting from sugar overproduction and increasing agrarian unrest. While Argentina in general experienced economic expansion in the 1920s, enjoying its best success since
before the First World War, the sugar industry of Tucumán did not share in the prosperity. Industrialists and cañeros (sugar cane farmers) expanded and modernized their facilities, but this earned them massive losses. Costs accelerated as prices fell. Between 1920 and 1930, world sugar prices plummeted ninety percent. The persistent sugar crisis, primarily based on overproduction, unified all interest parties around the need for tariff protection. By 1925, Argentina had the third-lowest sugar tariff of any major sugar consumer. As a result, foreign sugar flooded the market, depressing prices and plunging an already-struggling industry servicing the domestic market into economic depression.¹

The economic crisis stoked the political instability and social disorder throughout the decade. Tucumán had three governors in the 1920s, only one of whom, Miguel Campero, served his entire term. The 1912 Sáenz Peña electoral reform law brought political transformations to Tucumán, intensifying the political disputes between competing parties. Governor Octaviano Vera (r. 1922-23) of the Radical Party came to power in a decisive victory and promptly passed legislation guaranteeing a minimum wage and eight-hour workdays for laborers. Vera also increased existing taxes on the sugar industry and promulgated new ones. Industrialists fumed and violent strikes manifested in 1923 as workers demanded better wages at sugar factories throughout the province. As the countryside quaked, Vera lost control of the political arena, his party supporters deserted him and the federal government deposed him in October 1923. His

¹ D. Greenberg, “‘The Dictatorship of the Chimneys’: Sugar, Politics and Agrarian Unrest in Tucumán, Argentina 1914-1930.” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1985), 355-367. Greenberg asserts rail freight was the primary factor in rising sugar costs, noting it accounted for one-third of all transaction costs.
elected successor, Radical Miguel Campero (r. 1924-1928), struggled to undo the financial mess left by the sugar crisis and Vera. The countryside erupted again as cane farmers initiated increasingly violent strikes, and had 30,000 people marched on the capital in June 1927. This prompted the mediation by President Marcelo T. de Alvear between the cañeros and the industrialists. Governor José G. Sortheix (r. 1928-1930), also a Radical, entered office with the economy still stagnant and the problem of overproduction still unresolved. The conflict between cañeros and industrialists intensified again over the price for cane sold to factories. Sortheix also felt threatened by the wildly popular mayor of the provincial capital Juan Luis Nougués, of the newly-created Bandera Blanca party. At the governor’s request, the provincial legislature deposed the mayor in May 1930, prompting a public demonstration by 14,000 people protesting the intervention. The military revolution of September 1930 swept Sortheix from power.

This chapter presents the contours of the Syrian-Lebanese colony during the 1920s, focusing on the persistence of certain trends. Arabic-speaking merchants continued to be an economic force while non-elite Syrians and Lebanese maintained high rates of arrest for larceny and misdemeanor crimes. In addition, it assesses how Arabic-

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3 Páez de la Torre, La historia del Tucumán, 635-638.
speaking immigrants utilized *haflas* (gatherings or parties) and poetry to reflect upon and debate issues relating to life in Argentina. Personal insecurity, insults and violence touched many families as social and cultural elites set out to create a set of behaviors and roles for family members. While scholars of Arabic-speaking immigrants in Argentina have discussed in great detail the prejudicial discourses circulating throughout Argentine political and social circles, the scholarship rarely illustrates how Argentine and other immigrant malcontents victimized the more vulnerable sectors of this immigrant group, namely children and women. During this period of intense political instability and social unrest, the Arabic-speaking immigrant community also established an enduring cultural institution in 1925, the Syrian-Lebanese Society in San Miguel de Tucumán. In fact, the 1920s witnessed the establishment of associations throughout the northwestern provinces, such as the Syrian-Lebanese Union in Salta (1920) and the Syrian-Lebanese Society in Jujuy (1926). While the leaders in Tucumán advocated a pan-Arab cultural organization, they did little to incorporate the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the colony. Socioeconomic class interests outweighed shared cultural identities, as the Syrian-Lebanese Society effectively became a mercantile interest group. Yet, this emphasis on cultural identity and not on social aid gave the colony’s women the opportunity to perform charity, which was very successful in creating ties with key public institutions. Nevertheless, the majority of the immigrant community continued to rely on family and village-based networks, many of which were weak or nonexistent.

**The Syrian-Lebanese Colony in 1920s Tucumán**

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The 1920s for the Syrian-Lebanese colony in Tucumán continued two trends related to crime and commerce that emerged during the previous decade. Arabic-speakers suffered higher rates of arrest for aggravated assault, larceny, and public disorderliness than Spanish and Italians immigrants. At the same time, merchants from the colony maintained their position as a commercial force in the provincial economy, briefly becoming the wealthiest merchant group in the province in 1920. These trends resulted from the evolution of the immigrant community in Tucumán over the previous twenty-five years. The Syrian-Lebanese colony had segmented internally along class lines based upon participation in the local economy and, more importantly, the strength of one’s social networks.

Chart 4.1. Average Annual Arrest Rates for Felony Offenses, Province of Tucumán, 1920-1929

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5 *Anuario de estadística de la provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año 1920* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Graficos G. Kraft, 1922), 278.
The police in Tucumán arrested Arabic-speaking immigrants for larceny at significantly higher rates than the Spanish and Italian immigrant groups. Poverty likely contributed to these higher rates of arrest. For instance, Murad Canz filed a criminal complaint with the provincial capital police in March 1921 accusing his peones (workers) Felipe Budeguer and Servando David of stealing merchandise from a warehouse. Canz’s suspicions grew when the two workers spent more than their wages could sustain. The police searched the homes of Budeguer and David seizing merchandise belonging to the plaintiff. Budeguer and David confessed to committing the crime. David, however, later recanted before the judge, arguing he had bought the items himself. The two defendants worked as janitors for Canz and had access, though not permission, to the warehouse and the goods contained therein. Based on the confessions and the circumstantial evidence, the judge convicted Budeguer and David of larceny and gave them prison sentences of twenty-one and eight months respectively.6

This case illustrates the importance of poverty in committing certain crimes and how microsocial networks did not guarantee gainful employment. Firstly, Felipe

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6 APJ, Juzgado del Crimen, Sentencias, 1917 al 1922, October 31, 1921, 981-983.
Budeguer and Servando David, both sin instrucción (illiterate) Arabic-speaking immigrants who had been in Argentina for at least ten years, worked as jornaleros (day laborers), suggesting neither men possessed the skill sets that would have allowed them to work as skilled laborers or enter commerce successfully. Secondly, Budeguer and David worked for an Arabic-speaking immigrant, the plaintiff Murad Canz. Felipe Budeguer, at the very least, came from the same area, if not village, in Mount Lebanon as Canz, who likely provided the two men with employment based on the strength of this village-based network. Nevertheless, the strength of the network was relative because apparently Canz did not view either man as trustworthy of receiving goods on consignment for peddling, a popular economic activity of Arabic-speaking immigrants in the Americas.  

![Chart 4.2. Average Annual Arrest Rates for Misdemeanor Offenses, Province of Tucumán, 1920-1929. Source: Anuario de estadística correspondiente al año 1920, 166;](image)

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7 Ibid. Arabic-speaking immigrants procured goods on consignment in order to peddle throughout the towns and rural zones of Tucumán since the 1890s. It is interesting giving the connections between the Buedguer and Canz families that Murad Canz did not offer this opportunity to Felipe Budeguer. It may be that Budeguer and David were not interested in the opportunity.
While social dislocation, poverty and weak social networks help explain higher rates of arrest for aggravated assault and larceny, the elevated rate of arrest for public disorderliness suggests a public prejudice towards Syrian-Lebanese immigrants. A victim of felonious assault or theft had to file a public complaint with the police in order to prompt an arrest; however, disorderly conduct was a misdemeanor offense. The arresting officer possessed sole discretion in deciding to arrest the perpetrator, and these actions perhaps represented the enforcement of community standards, perceptions, and predispositions. Given that the decision to detain a person ultimately resided with the arresting officer, prejudice towards Arabic-speaking immigrants must have a played a role in the policemen’s determination. Whatever the reasons, Arabic-speakers were five times more likely to be arrested for public disorderliness than Spaniards and Italians, and one and one-half times more than the average provincial resident.

The Syrian-Lebanese merchant class fared very well during the first-half of the 1920s, maintaining its status as the wealthiest immigrant commercial group in the province until 1924. Attempting to seize on this prominence in the province, several wealthy merchants, in conjunction with members of the cultural elite, attempted to raise funds to construct a monument commemorating the 1916 centennial of Argentine independence. These elite immigrant men organized a Statue Committee (lajnat al-timthāl) to organize the fundraising process and commission the monument. The
committee featured the most prominent merchants of the colony all of diverse religious beliefs including Maronite Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Sephardic Jews – “our best merchants” in the words of one Arabic-language periodical.⁸

Chart 4.4. Merchandise Wealth per Merchant, Province of Tucumán, 1920-1929. Source: *Anuario de estadística correspondiente al año 1920*, 278; *Anuario de Estadística*

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⁸ The commemorative statue plan stalled and ultimately created controversy within the colony, prompting the intervention of the provincial Attorney General in the early 1930s. “Lajnat al-timthāl,” *al-Shabība al-Muttahida*, February 3, 1923. The committee consisted of Shadid Chabaia (President, Maronite), Saad Habib Saad (Vice President, Maronite), Pedro T. Karam (Secretary, Maronite), Chaker Farah Apas (Maronite, Treasurer), Asis Nadra (Vice Treasurer, Orthodox), and Elias Dip (Parliamentarian, Orthodox). Vocals were Said Madkur (Maronite), Murad Canz (Maronite), Isa Sucar (Sunni), Moises Dahan (Jewish), Merhi Satle (ʿAlawite). Dahan was also a founding member of the Sephardic Israelite Association of Benevolence of Tucumán (Asociación Israelita Sefaradí de Beneficencia de Tucumán), established in 1921. See Maria Esther Silberman de Cywiner, Ed., *Asociación Israelita Sefaradí de Beneficencia de Tucumán (1921-2006): Memoria y testimonios de su fundación y evolución* (Tucumán: Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 2006), 144.
correspondiente al año 1922, 258; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año 1923, 287; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año 1924, 305; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año 1925, 325; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año de 1926, 339; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año 1927, 327; Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año 1929, 359.

The second half of the decade, however, proved to be quite difficult as the merchant group fell to fourth wealthiest in the department on a per merchant basis. The established trading houses continued in importance, but smaller retailers faced bankruptcy as a very real possibility. The Italian merchant class fared well on a per merchant basis. This is likely due to the decrease in the numbers of traders, which fell by twenty-five percent between 1920 and 1925. It is likely that Italians who remained bought out or took control of their compatriots’ assets. In contrast, the number of Syrian-Lebanese traders increased by seven percent in the same years, accounting for the largest number of merchants on the basis on nationality in 1925. At the same time, the drag on the collective wealth was the low value of real estate, or lack of it. In fact, Arabic-speakers maintained their stock of merchandise well over the course of the decade and experienced less violent fluctuations as the other merchant groups. Great divergence in wealth and resources seemed to characterize the colony’s merchants as those wealthier members would seize control of the Syrian-Lebanese Society and maintain important connections to local political elites.

**Expressive Culture, Social Insecurity and the Immigrant Family**

Arabic-speakers used expressive culture, oral poetry performed orally at a hafla, to contemplate and contend with the issues of life in Argentina. Poets in the Arab World
remain important figures in society, and they possessed this prominence in immigrant communities throughout the Americas. Social critics who enjoyed enormous social capital among their peers, the power of their words had the potential to create discussion, inform debates pertaining to the socio-political context and incite rebuttals for and against the poet. As active members of their particular social setting (and not necessarily spokespersons for it) and influenced by the specific historical moment, their poetic manifestations reflected topics relating to society within which they lived. The great modern Syrian poet and critic Adonis observed, “poetry… is more than a means or a tool… It is rather, like language itself, an innate quality. It is not a stage in the history of human consciousness but a constituent of this consciousness.”

9 Emir Emin Arslan, the first Ottoman Consul General in Buenos Aires, published a book on Arab literature and legends in 1941, which was designed to present this rich tradition of Arab cultural life to the Argentine public. In it, Arslan covered the importance of poetry, asserting that “it’s rare [to find] an Arab of average culture, whatever his profession, who does not know how to compose verses. Those in the [rural] village also do it, but in another meter.”

10 After giving a history on the development of Arabic poetry, Arslan concluded, “poetry continued being cultivated by all those who spoke the Arabic language. Diplomats, governors, physicians, astronomers, nearly all are poets too.”

11 Arslan, Los Árabes, 41.

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9 Adonis, An Introduction to Arab Poetics (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 97.

10 Emir Emin Arslan, Los Árabes: reseña historico-literaria y leyendas (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sopena Argentina, 1941), 38.

11 Arslan, Los Árabes, 41.
Recent work on literary production by Arabic-speaking immigrants in South America observes that the major themes discussed by these writers included issues of identity and nostalgia for and the nature of the home they left.\(^\text{12}\) In fact, one scholar eschewed looking at poetry altogether because of this proclivity to focus on the homeland.\(^\text{13}\) Examples dealing with the frustrations, anxieties, and joys of migration, however, exist and must be explored. Migration dislocated people from their familiar socio-cultural environment and provoked them to reformulate how they viewed themselves and their role within the immigrant community and the host society. At the collective level, local memory was constantly contested, readjusted, and rewritten based upon the contingencies of life and goals of various actors. These discussions and discourses were as much about their life in Argentina as in the Middle East, and found expression in poetry.

Classic poetical themes such as friendship and community, women and marriage, and life and death were important aspects of the immigrant experience in Argentina, and the composition of a poem that was presented to one’s peers for further discussion and contemplation allowed Arabic-speaking immigrants to assess their experiences. Hence, expressive culture is a suitable venue from which one may attempt to assess what it meant to be an immigrant in the early decades of twentieth century Argentina. Since poets are active and integral members of society, their texts are a critical window into


\(^{13}\) Civantos, *Between Argentines and Arabs*, 18.
internal debates and issues surrounding the migrant experience.\textsuperscript{14} For instance, Jurj Assaf titled his first collection and referred to himself as the \textit{Nāziḥ}.\textsuperscript{15} The term translates as “emigrant,” but it also gives the connotation of great distance, wandering and displacement. This word choice is significant because the term generally employed is \textit{muhājir}, which also translates as emigrant, but gives the connotation of dissociation, separation, and abandonment. \textit{Nāziḥ} connotes a sense of alienation, but with a continued connection to the homeland.

The question of reception by the poet’s audience is of equal importance. Poetry, in the words of the folklorist Sabra Webber, serves as “one medium through which change is confronted” and how new understandings of change were presented to a group of peers for reflection and discussion.\textsuperscript{16} Poetry and its many sub-types and manifestations, and the particular works “are grounded in social practices of production

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Edward Said has argued that texts must be considered “worldly, to some degrees… events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted.” Edward Said, \textit{The World, the Text and the Critic} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 4.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Jurj Assaf migrated from Mount Lebanon, where he studied old Arabic poetry from village poets, to Buenos Aires in 1906, and worked as a journalist for the next forty years, publishing two poetry collections. See Jūrj Ṣaydah, \textit{Adabunā wa-udabāʾunā fī al-muhājir al-Amīrīkiyya}, 4\textsuperscript{th} Edition, (Tripoli, Lebanon: Maktabat al-Sa’ih, 1999), 463-465.
\end{itemize}
and reception.17 This interplay between poet and audience created a space within which to address the concerns associated with life in Argentina. Hence, the hafla formed a critical space in which poetry functioned as an important tool in raising issues important to the community in a foreign setting.18

Poetry also served as a vital cultural resource with which Arabic-speakers utilized to address questions of personal insecurity, criminality, and personal comportment. While poorer Arabic-speaking immigrants experienced higher rates of physical altercations, Argentines and other immigrants targeted members, including women and children, of the Syrian-Lebanese colony in northwestern Argentina. In these cases, immigrants utilized the judicial system to pursue justice; achieving varying degrees of success. Many men and women from Greater Syria worked as itinerant peddlers and later as shopkeepers, and, as a result, these merchants could be targets for violence. The occasion of a death of the Syrian immigrant provided another opportunity for the community to gather and celebrate the life of the fallen. Like a wedding ritual, burial ceremonies also presented the opportunity to express sentiments through poetry. The case of Amin Hamdar is a revealing example.


18 *Hafla* translates into the English as “assembly,” “gathering,” and “party” depending on the context, and it could be a simple as a couple of immigrants meeting in their place of residence and enjoying each other’s company. A hafla could also be a sophisticated and organized event celebrating the engagement of a young couple, the passing of a fellow immigrant, or a “party of resistance” against the French mandate in the Levant. What is important here is the forum the gathering presented for an Arabic-speaking poet to deliver orally his creation to peers. These haflas were and continue to be critical spaces where identity was constructed, fleshed out and contested.
In the wake of Amin’s murder, Elias Turbay, composing a poem at his funeral, lamented the loss of his friend at the hand of a killer and the lack of justice.\textsuperscript{19} Then, Turbay declared,

They have killed the generous, but they/have tasted what you have tasted, but even more so
They were ignorant for not knowing that the lion leaves lions behind/until your son showed them what dismays
He gave them the fire that you had been given/
Your killer got the punishment/yes, the punishment for doing wrong
Rest in peace in your coffin/Hearts have a love for you that will not be buried
I will not forget you/I will always remember you, I am your poet
Your death has made every free soul/mourn and bleed sorrow for “Hamdar”\textsuperscript{20}

This powerful poem speaks to the tragedy that always lurked near migrants, describing a sense of alienation as well as an understanding of an incomplete integration and acceptance into local society. More importantly are the actions of the fallen’s son, who seemingly exacted a revenge killing in response to his father’s murder. It is unclear what happened to the son, but it is significant that Amin Hamdar’s son took matters into his own hand. More of a human and visceral response than a cultural disposition to violence and revenge killings, the actions of Hamdar’s son speaks to a general perception of vulnerability and lack of trust in Argentine institutions by immigrants.

The tone of the poem also suggests that poet Elias Turbay supported the actions of the younger Hamdar in the killing of the Argentine man responsible for Amin’s death.

\textsuperscript{19} Elias Turbay arrived in Argentina before World War I and ultimately settled in the northwestern province of Tucumán. He worked as a journalist, as well as a merchant who owned a general store. He was an important member of the immigrant elite in Tucumán.

\textsuperscript{20} Turbay, \textit{al-Manẓumāt al-Durriyya}, 104-105.
Given the public performance of this poem during the burial ceremony, it would also suggest broad support for the revenge of Amin’s death, or at the very least the willingness to debate the appropriateness of this response. That Elias Turbay performed this poem in Arabic also gave the Syrian community in the Tucumán an ability to discuss this tragedy and the subsequent revenge killing largely free of scrutiny from Argentine authorities.

Yet finding resolution to a violent crime was not always possible. In the autumn afternoon of April 24, 1924, five-year-old Esther David Abdala appeared in the street crying and unable to speak. Blood covered her underwear and she had lesions on her genitals. Witnesses rushed to her aid, inquired what happened, and took her to her father. Her eight-year-old brother Elias accused Argentine Simón María Albornoz of doing cochinadas (“dirty things”) with his hand to Esther while she was in his grocery store. The police immediately initiated an inquiry and arrested Albornoz.21

The provincial prosecutor (fiscal) charged Albornoz with rape and asked for an eight-year prison sentence. David Abdala, Esther’s father, filed an additional brief demanding the fullest punishment allowed under the law. The defense argued its case on two points. Firstly, the Albornoz asserted the Abdala family targeted him because of commercial rivalry and “hate.” David Abdala was a merchant who had a small haberdashery on Maipú Street, the heart of the Syrian-Lebanese merchant community. The Arabic-speaking merchant force likely generated some ill will from competing businessmen because of their strength in the local economy.22 Secondly, Albornoz’s

21 APJ, Fallos del Superior Tribunal de Justicia, Volume 7, fojas 46-51.

22 Ibid.
lawyer argued the medical reports did not establish the crime of rape, and the witnesses did not know who abused the child. The investigating physicians observed that fingers of a hand, and not a penis, caused the damage to Esther’s genitals. The doctors concluded a penis would have caused much greater damage and, as a result, the crime was not technically rape, but rather *abuso deshonesto* (corruption of a minor). Moreover, the witnesses assembled at the offices of the *Comité Políti­co* (Political Committee) next door to Albornoz’s shop found Esther in the street and did not suspect the accused of perpetrating the crime.23

The case thus rested on the testimony of Elias Abdala, Esther’s brother, and Primitiva Aráoz, the defendant’s servant. Both witnesses placed Esther in Albornoz’s store at the time of the crime; however, the testimony diverged on the defendant’s *actitud* (behavior) toward Esther. For the presiding judge, this testimony did not have probative force and, as a result, created substantial doubt about the defendant’s guilt. The judge absolved Albornoz, and the province’s Superior Court affirmed the original ruling in 1925.24

The case of Esther Abdala is important for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the defense explicitly suggested commercial rivalry between the accused and Esther’s father may have been a likely factor in why Albornoz targeted Esther. Secondly, the case

23 Ibid. Two of the six witnesses who were in the Political Committee offices were Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, Fortunato Nallar and Pedro Abraham. This is a very early example of Arabic-speaking immigrants participating in formal political institutions. It is unclear to which political party or institution this committee was connected.

24 Ibid.
illustrated the systemic complexity in achieving justice in a sexual assault case, regardless of social position. Donna Guy has demonstrated the great difficulty Argentine prosecutors had in successfully prosecuting rape accusations. Men accused of sexual assault who did not openly confess to the crime were rarely convicted. As a result, a code of silence developed preventing the reform of the criminal code. Hence, Albornoz’s silence likely played a more important role in securing his exoneration than David Abdala’s status as an immigrant, whose daughter Esther possessed Argentine citizenship.25

While the assault of Esther is an extreme example of violence against female immigrants, women of the colony faced other forms of public ridicule and humiliation. On a summer morning in late December 1923, Emilio Cattan and Ángel Joaquín left their homes for work only to discover malicious posters targeting their wives, as well as the spouse of their compatriot Abraham Ana. Apparent enemies of these immigrants plastered these broadsides on the street corners of La Quiaca, a town in the far north of Jujuy province on the border with Bolivia. One poster read,

The boys of La Quiaca are protesting against the three Turkish women accustomed to partying overnight. The ladies of the bordello are also protesting for having these three clandestine prostitutes ruin their business. We are surprised the husbands are so weak… Joaquín is crooked and Abraham Ana is a gross and useless old man suffering at the hands of his wife. Like this, we have well understood that the women, when there is

no one to party with them, go to the public bath in [San Salvador de] Jujuy searching for clients and weak-willed men their husbands send to them.26

The discourse of the posters suggested the immigrant men practiced business in an unethical manner, cowered to the whims of their spouses, and permitted their wives to practice sexual commerce. The impugning of their wives’ reputation, and their own honor, prompted Emilio Cattan and Ángel Joaquín to travel nearly 200 miles south to the provincial capital of San Salvador and file a formal complaint initiating a criminal investigation. The two immigrants accused Julio Gamez and Hector Valdiviezo of calumny, both of whom the police arrested as the inquiry got underway. In their interrogations, the defendants claimed innocence. Gamez asserted he had been in Bolivia for a family wedding at the time of the event. Furthermore, he argued an enemy of his gave the original testimony accusing him of the crime. Valdiviezo, an employee at the hotel run by Joaquín and Ana, said he worked late into the evening and did not see the posters the following morning on his way to work. He declared he only learned of the posters after Sra. Elena de Joaquín informed him of their existence. When asked by investigators if the targeted women had enemies in La Quiaca, Valdiviezo replied that the three ladies “were well connected in the town.”27

26 Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Jujuy (hereafter AHJ), Juicio por injurias graves inferidas a los señores Emilio Cattan y Ángel Joaquín y Abraham Ana en La Quiaca, “Denuncia,” February 2, 1924, fojas 1-2v.

27 AHJ, Juicio por injurias graves inferidas a los señores Emilio Cattan y Ángel Joaquín y Abraham Ana en La Quiaca, “Declaratoria,” February 9, 1924, fojas 11v-14.
Despite numerous witness testimonies contradicting the alibis of the two defendants, the case stalled because no eyewitness could confirm if either defendant created the posters or plastered them on the street corners. As a result, the assault on the honor of the three Arabic-speaking immigrant families had no formal resolution. Nevertheless, the event reveals how prejudicial discourses circulating around Syrian-Lebanese in the Argentine Northwest could materialize. In small towns such as La Quiaca, the impugning of one’s honor and that of one’s spouse likely carried greater weight than in the cosmopolitan setting of Buenos Aires. For an immigrant merchant, the accusation had the potential to destroy his livelihood and undermine any social standing achieved at that point in time. It is unclear if Cattan, Joaquin or Ana attempted any sort of extrajudicial measures to achieve restitution from the perpetrators.

As Syrian-Lebanese immigrant families increased in number in the principal towns of northwestern Argentina in the early 1920s, in particular the provincial capitals of Jujuy, Salta, Santiago del Estero, and Tucumán, anxiety over how to raise children became a central concern. This decade also witnessed the formation of enduring community institutions that organized the community and likely provided an additional layer of protection for the immigrant communities that their countrymen in small towns did not enjoy. At the same time, the Arabic-speaking intellectual community blossomed in Tucumán and produced more than six periodicals in the decade. Two of the most commented-upon issues were the immigrant family and the raising of children.

28 According to the 1914 census, Buenos Aires’ population numbered 1,560,986 whereas La Quiaca’s was less than 2,000. Tercer Censo, Volume II, 149, Volume IV, 469-475.
Recent scholarship has investigated the formation and maintenance of immigrant families and transformations of notions of family and models of kinship transformation. Nancy Foner defines the family as “a place where there is a dynamic interplay between structure, culture, and agency – where creative culture-building takes place in the context of external social and economic forces as well as immigrants’ premigration cultural frameworks.”29 The central tension lay between the attempts to shape notions of the family in a manner to achieve the opportunities found in the host society and immigrants’ cultural conceptions and symbolic understandings of family. Gender and generation also played a critical role.

Foner correctly points out immigrants reformulated what they understood to be cultural traditions when faced with the stresses of integration into a foreign society. In the case of the Syrian-Lebanese immigrant colony, Argentines and other immigrants occasionally acted against them in a hostile manner. Migration dislocated migrants from their familiar socio-cultural milieu, prompting these people to refashion how they viewed themselves and their traditions, as well as their role within the immigrant community and the host society. Understandings of family formed the central component to this self-positioning.

Akram Khater examined the contested process of communal and individual identity formation among Lebanese immigrants in the United States in the first quarter of the twentieth century. For the author, the “most immediately relevant set of social signifiers was embodied in the family,” and was thus more important than religious or

political identities. Thus, family was “a set of social relations whose depth and thickness is subject to historical change brought about by internal tensions and external pressures.” The Lebanese in North America “encountered a hegemonic middle-class culture bent of transforming them from Old World peasants to a New World working class.” Some Lebanese immigrants focused on the family as a “heightened source of authentic identity,” whereas others “accepted [American] bourgeois notions of family” in an attempt to gain acceptance into local society. In general, Arabic-speaking intellectual elite men in North America argued against Syrian-Lebanese women working outside of the home, suggesting the phenomenon sullied the honor of the community. Despite this discomfort with women in the work place, the majority of Arabic-speaking women in the United States worked in local labor markets.30

Afifa Karam, an immigrant woman based in the United States and writing in the first decade of the twentieth century, created four archetypes of women: good, working, ignorant and deceitful. Ignorant women were the “disease of civilization and the curse of modernization,” while deceitful ladies acted as if they were “good;” however, they were the “snake that poisons the honey of life.” Working women did not necessarily live a life without morals, yet a milieu full of “dangers” surrounded them that could compromise their honor. The good woman, for Afifa Karam, was “one who attends to her duties and

helps her mother, and who later as a bride makes her husband happy and makes her house a paradise.”  

Foner and Khater provide invaluable insight into the formation of immigrant families, the issues surrounding understandings of them by immigrants themselves, and how internal and external forces prompt constant reevaluation. Nancy Foner created a general template that provided a series of factors influencing family transformation.  

A critical component missing, however, is how the internal dynamics at a class level affect notions of family among the immigrant community. In addition, internal perceptions of exogamous marriage are a necessary variable in understanding how immigrant families associated with each other and shared spaces of sociability.

Akram Khater built his discursive analysis from a series of articles published in *al-Huda*, a leading Arabic-language periodical based in New York City, between 1898 and 1905. While presenting the discourses that framed elite understandings of family, Khater eschews how the discourses may have shifted over the course of the first quarter of the twentieth century in response to local contingencies and transnational events, such as the First World War and the famine that afflicted their homelands and forced the reformulation of family there. Moreover, he does not discuss how the community members associated with each other beyond the spaces of sociability found in places of

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31 Quoted in Khater, “‘Queen of the House?’,” 284-285.

32 The criteria include 1) role of premigration, family, marriage and kinship beliefs and practices, 2) demographic composition of the immigrant group, 3) sex and age ratios in each group affecting marriage and family patterns, 4) economic conditions and opportunities in the host society, 5) access to governmental welfare programs, 6) cultural beliefs and values of the host value circulated by media institutions, schools and other media, and 7) legal codes. See Foner, “The Immigrant Family,” 970.
accommodation. Immigrants establishing social and cultural institutions throughout the Americas are a signature feature of this moment of mass migration, and the requirements for joining these institutions linked directly to material concerns as well as considerations of what constituted a proper family.

Arabic-speaking immigrants in Argentina directly confronted compelling issues surrounding notions of family and identity. Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals like Jurj Assaf seemingly embraced the increasing appearance of women in the public sphere and its impact on interpersonal relations. This embrace for Assaf was seemingly a marker of modernity itself. In a poem entitled “Woman,” Assaf composed:

We want you in the middle of our social gatherings among us/ we abhor you standing scared behind the curtains
Is it not time that our eyes receive the light/ and our eyelids cast off the darkness?
The age of darkness has passed with its ignorance/and we are now in an age of golden sunlight

... 
Prejudices abandon every heart/as burdens depart every shoulder
We have wronged you by what we did and [yet] we claimed/pride, yet injustice is never a characteristic of the lofty-minded
Is it not time for a cultured husband to meet you/with a smiling face and not a scowl?33

Assaf, a Maronite Catholic, criticized past practices by his compatriots against women, equating these abuses to darkness. At the same time, the opportunities awaiting women in Argentina were numerous and women deserved an enlightened and modern husband, much like the intellectuals Assaf and his peers viewed themselves to be. Interpersonal relationships between immigrant men and women were also critical.

components of the experience abroad and marriage could help contribute a sense of finality and permanence to the journey. It is clear that Jurj Assaf advocated the modern woman emerging in Argentina in the beginning decades of the twentieth century. Marriage for Syrians in Argentina, however, created a place of humanity and an opportunity for the community to gather together and celebrate the union, especially the marriage of two immigrants. It was in moments like weddings that the Syrian colony in Argentina could celebrate the building of a home and recreate community.

For instance, Elias Turbay composed the following poem in commemoration of the marriage between Nagib Baaclini and Amelia Hobeika, both Maronite Catholics.

Turbay declaimed,

Nagib, you enjoy the good grace of a young woman/No doubt
A pretty girl that God has given her a love for/all knowledge and eloquence… She is yours
No doubt your luck is crowned with success/and your good fortune’s snare caught an angel
Be in peace both of you/and drink of that happiness

Turbay, in his short poem, alluded to some interesting characteristics of the marriage. Firstly, Nagib’s bride Amelia was a well-educated woman who, according to family history, attended the Syrian Protestant College, now the American University of Beirut. Indeed, she would be a useful resource for Nagib’s career as a journalist and publisher by providing an irregular column discussing the role of women in the family. Secondly, and more humorous, Turbay consistently referred to Nagib’s luck in marrying Amelia and catching an angel. Most importantly, Turbay recited this poem at the

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34 Turbay, *al-Manẓumāt al-Durriyya*, 75.
wedding celebration, which was an important space of sociability for Syrian immigrants in Argentina. In the case of Nagib and Amelia, a Maronite Catholic priest conducted the ceremony. The ritual of marriage, which included poetics, helped reinforce established cultural practices and thus the expression of a cultural identity.\textsuperscript{35}

Raising children in Argentina caused distress for many Syrian-Lebanese. For instance, Yousef Abdullah Wahbeh, an Arabic-speaking immigrant living in Corrientes, wrote a letter to the editor of the Arabic-language monthly \textit{al-Ikhāʾ} (\textit{The Brotherhood}) published in San Miguel de Tucumán relating an encounter with a police officer. In the days before the May 25 Revolution celebration, the policeman approached the merchant and encouraged him to hang an Argentine flag and the flag of his nation. Wahbeh responded affirmatively, but after the officer walked away, Wahbeh wondered what flag and the colors of it belonged to his country. He then wept. In the recounting of this story, Wahbeh asked for the editor’s opinion. The editor Yubran Massuh, a Protestant from Hama, responded by giving a long treatise discussing how the Ottoman Empire enacted a series of policies that never truly allowed the Arab populations to be a part of the nation. He continued stating that the future of the old country and its people would not benefit from developing under French or British tutelage, as designed by the mandates given by the League of Nations. Massuh then asserted every country has a

\textsuperscript{35} While Nagib and Amelia celebrated their weddings at the Maronite Catholic Church, they first had to register with the state. The Civil Code came into effect in 1887, and was an attempt to assert the primacy of the state at the expense of the Catholic Church in the personal affairs of the country’s population. Donna J. Guy, “Lower-Class Families, Women, and the Law in Nineteenth-Century Argentina,” \textit{Journal of Family History}, 10, no. 3 (1985): 318-331.
flag, and any standard for their homelands should possess the color red, which recognized the blood spilt in achieving independence.

Massuh then shifted the discussion to the emigrant’s different responsibility to the state, arguing the immigrant’s country is the country in which he or she resides in. There they work, form families and raise their children. Immigrants must strive to ascend socially in the best way possible through hard work and remaining on the rightful path. Yubran Massuh concluded it was not irreconcilable to maintain cultural aspects of one’s home country while committing to life in Argentina, emphasizing the focus should be on their role in their new home country. Massuh’s comments are significant because he stressed the need for immigrants to strive as best they can to be successful and to raise their families in their new surroundings. At the same time, he asserted that after fifty years of emigration, the old country’s prospects of becoming a free nation like countries in the Americas would be a difficult task, if not impossible.

Amelia Albaca (Hubayqa) de Baaclini concentrated on women’s roles and obligations in the family. In an Arabic opinion piece published in her husband Nagib’s periodical Ṣada al-Sharq, Amelia declared God entrusted family upbringing to women. In strongly religious rhetoric, she defined the model wife and mother as calmly rational, gentle in manners, peaceful in thought, and learned. Moreover, the mother’s desire focused upon her family, carrying out her predestined path and increasing familial bliss in her kingdom. If the mother failed to do so, she was on par with the devil. For the author, the mother’s important responsibility was raising her child and providing cultural

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36 “Suʿāl wa jawābuḥu,” al-Ikhāʾ (San Miguel de Tucumán), June 1925, 1-7.
development, instilling a sense of honor and patriotism. In spite of these motherly duties, Amelia de Baaclini argued women needed to leave the house. The house was her kingdom, not her prison. Yet, women, the family’s foundational rock, should not leave until they had completed all their responsibilities in the home.  

Amelia de Baaclini’s essay differs from those from the essays discussed earlier. As Akram Khater noted, these men suggested women brought shame to the Syrian communities by working outside the home. Just as in the United States at the same time, the majority of Arabic-speaking in Argentina worked outside the home. De Baaclini did not necessarily advocate women’s employment outside of the house. Indeed, she defined a woman who works at home, tending to the family chores, as the ideal type. Nevertheless, she encouraged a social life outside the home while emphasizing the sacred duty of motherhood and wifehood.

**The Syrian-Lebanese Society, Homeland Politics and Local Leadership**

While the Arabic press in Tucumán advocated certain behavioral norms regarding the family, Syrian-Lebanese cultural elites also promoted a politics of Arab cultural unity in the face of competing proto-nationalisms circulating throughout the American mahjar. Inspiration for a lasting association emerged in Spring 1925 following a public lecture given by the charismatic Dr. Habib Estéfano titled “The Future of our People in our

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37 “al-ṭarbiyya al-’a’iliyya,” Ṣada al-Sharq, February 2, 1929.

38 Habib Estéfano (1888-1942), a former Maronite priest, became the Orator of the Nation during King Faisal’s short-lived reign in Damascus (1919-1920). Estéfano then moved to Argentina, where he held citizenship, and traveled across Latin America giving public speeches regarding the Arab nationalist movement as well as extolling the virtues of Hispanic culture and its connections with Arab heritage. In addition, Estéfano
Country and America.” Following this speech, leading members of the Arabic-speaking colony began agitating for the creation of a cultural institution. On the evening of November 17, 1925, Habib Estéfano presided over a meeting of fifty invited members from the Syrian-Lebanese colony held at the home of Fortuna Saad, a leading merchant. During the proceedings, the attendees appointed a commission to draft the organizing principles of the entity. The invited members reconvened at the home of Fortuna’s brother Selim two days later and approved to guiding beliefs. The same commission established a membership scheme for founding members, which produced the purchase of a total of 543 shares by forty-six immigrants. With the start-up capital secured, the founding members established the Syrian-Lebanese Society and elected its first board of directors on November 22, 1925, with Selim Saad, a Maronite, as its president.

Politics of the homeland, however, never fully faded away in the minds of immigrants in Argentina or the colony in Tucumán. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of French colonial states in Lebanon and Syria, a

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40 Ponsati, *Aportes para una reseña de la colectividad árabe Tucumána*, 25-26, 31-32. This commission featured prominent members of the immigrant community Selim Saad, Nallib Nadra, Pedro Caram, Isa Neme, Pedro Nacif Estofan and Isa Sucar (four Christians and one Muslim). Active members elected Boards of Directors every two years. Of the twenty-seven different men who served on the three boards formed between 1925 and 1930, only three were recognized public intellectuals (P. Nacif Estofán, Yubran Massuh, and Nagib Baaelini). The rest were merchants.
contentious debate circulated throughout the Americas, including the communities in the Argentine northwest, over the future of the homelands. Earlier in the decade, a group of young intellectuals created the United Youth Society with the express purpose of advocating a politics of cultural unity as an alternative to the competing nationalisms. The Great Syrian Revolt, which took place from 1925 to 1927, again placed these divisive issues into the center of this immigrant community and, as a result, created intense stress within it.

Emir Emin Arslan, a Druze and former Ottoman Consul, led the charge of the Arab nationalists in Argentina with his weekly publication *al-Istiqlāl (Independence)* during the 1920s and 1930s. Every edition of his periodical included an essay by Shakīb Arslan – Emin’s first cousin and leader of the Arab nationalist movement before the League of Nations. Emin Arslan accused the Maronites of Mount Lebanon of being the sole supporters of the French Mandate. More provocatively, Arslan – himself from Mount Lebanon – declared this piece of territory as a part of the country of Syria. In Buenos Aires, the prominent periodical *al-Mursal*, published by Maronite priests, printed positive news of the French mandate and editorials supporting it. One’s religious identity, however, was not always predictive of political allegiance. For instance, Wadi Schamún, who was from a politically important Maronite family in Mount Lebanon and the dean of Arabic-speaking journalists in Argentina, supported ardently the Arab nationalist cause through his newspaper. Conversely, Muhammad Haidar, a Sunni Muslim living in Jujuy, supported the creation of the Lebanese state.

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In spite of Habib Estéfano’s esteem within the collectivity, neither he nor the Syrian-Lebanese Society could forge any sort of political consensus. For instance, in October 1926 Estéfano gave a public lecture in Tucumán excoriating the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon. Nagib Baaclini published an editorial in his newspaper Ṣada al-Sharq, berating Estéfano as “a renegade ex-Maronite priest” who suffered from a “Bedouin mentality.” Baaclini then argued France was the right partner for Lebanon as it was the paladin of culture and democratic governance.42

Given the divisive and acrimonious nature of the debate surrounding the French Mandate, the Syrian-Lebanese Society played a critical role in emphasizing a shared cultural identity and subsuming this debate. Indeed, the Society’s guidelines called for elevating the moral and social situation of the collectivity, tightening the bonds of brotherhood between the Syrian-Lebanese brethren resident in the province, helping each other mutually, defending their rights and doing everything possible for the glamour of the Syrian-Lebanese name in the country; and eliminating all participation of political factions and religious tendencies from the heart of the Society, thus making it an eminent exponent of culture and sociability.

A central question emerged over whom or what institution represented the Arabic-speaking community in Tucumán. The massive cane farmer strike and march on the provincial capital on June 2, 1927 became the first test for the society. The conflict reached a tipping point in the spring of 1927 as cane farmers, recently organized by the Argentine Agrarian Federation (FAA), demanded that industrialists buy cane at a set

42 “Habib Estéfano o Estofán,” Ṣada al-Sharq, October 30, 1926.
price based on weight. Work stoppages began in the southwestern section of the province and rapidly spread throughout the sugar belt as the *zafra*, or harvest season, approached. As rural unrest and violence increased, the FAA successfully constructed a multi-class coalition of support consisting of most independent farmers, rural workers, urban laborers, and small merchants, many of whom donated money to the FAA’s initiative.\(^{43}\)

In the days leading up to the June 2 general strike in San Miguel de Tucumán, the *Centro de Mayoristas* (Wholesalers’ Center), the Yrigoyenist wing of the Radical Party, and the Communist Party had all pledged moral and material support to the cañeros. On May 28, Nagib Baaclini authored an editorial in his newspaper supporting the aims and goals of the cane farmers, declaring to speak on behalf of the Arabic-speaking communities. On the day of the strike, Selim Saad, President of the Syrian-Lebanese Society, penned a letter published in the Tucumán daily *La Gaceta* publicly refuting his fellow founding member Baaclini’s assertion that the colony was in solidarity with the cane farmers and the FAA. Saad argued the Society, being “eminently commercial,” was using its corresponding right to defend the interests of its membership. The organization viewed as its obligation to publicly announce that it did not endorse Baaclini’s opinion, proclaiming instead its support for the general welfare and desire for a prompt solution to the conflict for the benefit of all interested parties.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{44}\) “La Sociedad Sirio-Libanesa de Tucumán se ha dirigido ayer a la Dirección de *La Gaceta*,” *La Gaceta*, June 2, 1927.
Two interrelated issues provoked Saad’s response, namely business concerns and the issue of community leadership. Business suffered due to intensifying unrest and violence in the small towns, and Syrian-Lebanese merchants were tepid to the calls for general strikes. Furthermore, the FAA called for the creation of consumer cooperatives in the cities and towns throughout the province. Many of the Society’s membership possessed shops in the company towns and urban areas that developed in the sugar belt. These merchants feared these cooperatives would undercut their business.\footnote{Greenberg, “Sugar Depression and Agrarian Revolt,” 322.} In addition, some of the larger merchants, including Selim Saad, owned firms that directly supplied the sugar factories. In a purely pragmatic business decision, the Society’s leadership decided to withhold support for the cañeros. Secondly, the \textit{Ṣada al-Sharq} editorial posed an important question regarding who spoke for the community. Baaclini, very popular both within and outside the immigrant community, had long served as an important defender of the community through his newspaper, which began publication in 1917.

The founding members of the Syrian-Lebanese Society originally created an entity advocating a politics of cultural unity; however, it evolved to be a promoter of the commercial sector of the immigrant community. Hence, the Syrian-Lebanese Society moved to secure its primacy within the Arabic-speaking colony in Tucumán during a moment of intense political and social unrest.

While the Syrian-Lebanese Society consolidated its position as representative of the collectivity, it also moved to create and strengthen ties with the local political elite. For instance, the board of directors considered producing a tribute (\textit{homenaje}) for the
provincial Governor José B. Sortheix. Board member Jorge Schehdan, who spoke on behalf of the committee charged with organizing the tribute, suggested the board postpone the event for another time because of a lack of justification, as well as the unstable political situation affecting Tucumán in 1929. The board of directors accepted the advice and tabled the proposed project.46

Gender and the Performance of Charity

It is clear the Syrian-Lebanese Society evolved into an institution run by and for the collectivity’s merchant elite. The directors did conduct charitable acts on specific occasions or in response to particular requests; however, the leadership refused to transform the institution into a mutual aid society. Instead, the Society sought ways to create public linkages to the political elite in the Tucumán, making pragmatic decisions based on the current state of affairs. The Syrian-Lebanese Society attempted to achieve social recognition in order raise the status of Arabic-speaking community in Tucumán, but in a disorganized way and at the expense of the poorer members of the immigrant community. After a successful campaign to increase the organization’s membership, the Society’s board of directors faced a quandary over what kind of institution it should be. According to the guiding principles written in 1925, the organizers envisioned an association that would help each other mutually (ayudarse mutuamente); however, the former president Selim Saad declared publicly that the Society was “an entity eminently

46 Libro de Actas de Comisión Directiva y Comisión de Hacienda de la Sociedad de Siriolibanesa (hereafter ACD), Acta No. 96, Sesión extraordinaria de la C.D., June 27, 1929, 2-4.
commercial.” Nevertheless, Society Secretary Anis Schamún, a Maronite, presented a project to the Board of Directors that would create a program providing free medical care for members. He argued the critical mass of active members of the association warranted the offering of this benefit. A spirited discussion followed during which various members of the board offered their support for the project. The Society, however, was momentarily ultimately declared not to be in a position to enact the proposal. Seeing that the motion was bound to fail, Schamún withdrew his plan.  

In spite of the failed proposal, the Society donated sums of money to people who petitioned for help. Wealthier Arabic-speaking immigrants had been giving to social aid entities, such as the Sociedad de Beneficencia de Tucumán, as early as 1920, and the Society did give cash donations to institutions like public hospitals. Vice President Pedro Caram motioned to create a public donation campaign on behalf of Ms. Henoud, a widow and Maronite, to help pay for the medical expenses for her ill daughter. The

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47 “La Sociedad Sirio Libanesa de Tucumán se ha dirigido ayer a la Dirección de La Gaceta,” La Gaceta (San Miguel de Tucumán), June 2, 1927.

48 ACD, Acta No. 103, Sesión extraordinaria de la C.D., November 7, 1929, 13-15. Anis Schamún’s had two brothers living in Buenos Aires who were important public intellectuals. Wadi Schamún was the dean of Arabic-speaking journalists in Argentina. Alejandro served as the unofficial representative of the Arabic-speaking community to the Argentine state before the arrival of the Ottoman Consul General in 1910. Wadi and Alejandro published the periodical al-Salām, which began circulation in 1902. In addition, these gentlemen arranged a free medical clinic for Arabic-speaking before the start of World War I.

49 For instance, the Board of Directors received a thank you letter for their donation from the directors of the state-run Hospital Padilla. ACD, Acta No. 96, Sesión extraordinaria de la C.D., June 27, 1929, 2-4.
board was very pleased with the success of its fundraising, accruing 224 pesos. Razuk Sabra, a Muslim, petitioned the Syrian-Lebanese Society for monetary help because he was ill and in desperate need. Board members Nallib Nadra, a Greek Orthodox, and David Nallar, a Maronite, confirmed the illness, and a long debate occurred on how best to help their sick countryman. The board of directors ultimately settled on a motion forwarded by Anis Schamún. The proposal called for giving Razuk Sabra a certificate in the name of the Society that also contained the names of those who donated funds. The Society itself donated thirty pesos and Isa Salomon immediately donated twenty pesos. Upon receipt of the charity, Razuk Sabra delivered a letter to the board of directors thanking its members for their help on his behalf. In addition to providing funds for the needy, the Society also paid for the supplies for the funeral of deceased member and Christian Adib Maxud’s. The issue of transforming the Syrian-Lebanese Society into a mutual aid organization proved to be unattractive for the directors. This refusal to implement a broad welfare program is a distinction from the other principal immigrant

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50 Abu Sa’d, *Mu’jam Asmāʿ al-Usar wa-l-Ashkhās*, 944; ACD, Acta No. 100, September 4, 1929, 9. When someone petitioned money from the Society, the board of directors tasked a commission to investigate the claim and report back on its validity. In the case of Ms. Henoud, the board tasked Pedro Caram, the person who raised the motion, and Isa Salomon to investigate and organize the fundraising.

51 Abu Sa’d, *Mu’jam Asmāʿ al-Usar wa-l-Ashkhās*, 517-518.

52 ACD, Acta No. 101, September 18, 1929, 10-11; Acta No. 102, October 2, 1929, 12.

53 See, for instance, ACD, Acta No. 102, October 2, 1929, 12; Acta No. 104, November 20, 1929, 16-18. Michel Maxud, brother to the deceased, sent a letter to the board of directors, which included a donation of 100 pesos, thanking them for their gesture.
groups in the province, as well as Arabic-speaking collectivities in other areas of Argentina. The evolution of the colony in Argentina and its segmented class structure likely played an important factor influencing the association’s leadership.

Hence, the work of organized public charity primarily fell to the women of the Syrian-Lebanese colony. Under the industrious leadership of Alcira Malouf de Saad, the Women’s Committee of the Syrian-Lebanese Society organized clothes drives and distributed the materials to the two public hospitals, Padilla and Santillan, in San Miguel de Tucumán as early as 1927.54 Alcira, the wife of Selim and a Maronite, and the Women’s Committee also arranged artistic festivals which “served to highlight the artistic value modestly hidden within the community” and acted as “transcendental social acts.”55 Judging from the Society’s effusive congratulatory letter, these events proved important for bringing together members of the Arabic-speaking community living in Tucumán and showcasing its more creative members.

The Society of Greek Orthodox Women, established in October 1926, became a leading practitioner of charitable acts on behalf of the Arabic-speaking communities in Tucumán. This association, organized at the encouragement of Fr. Pedro (Buṭrus) Khoury, had four aims: to build an Orthodox church in Tucumán, to construct a school for all children of the collectivity regardless of “race or religion,” to erect a mausoleum to bury deceased members of the Orthodox faith, and do works of charity and help the

54 Director of Public Assistance to Alcira M. de Saad, December 7 and 20, 1927, private collection.

55 Letter from Syrian-Lebanese Society Vice President Pedro Caram to Alcira Maluf de Saad, October 6, 1927, private collection.
The Orthodox Women earned recognition from the immigrant community for their charitable work targeting the poor and infirm by 1929. These women also had representatives of the organization throughout the province of Tucumán, and likely had connections with the Orthodox communities in Santiago del Estero and Salta. In the early years of the association, raised monies covered the travel expenses of Fr. Khoury, who traveled throughout the province ministering to his flock living in the small towns. The Women’s Society performed an important role within the community for families of modest means by donating money to engagement parties for young Orthodox couples. Yet, the women also raised and donated sums of money to larger national catastrophes. For instance, in June 1929, the Society donated 100 pesos to the recovery efforts targeting families affected by the earthquake in Mendoza.

**Conclusion**

Class identities overwhelmed any sense of solidarity based on shared cultural identity in the evolution of the flagship community institution. This manifestation prevented the creation of a social aid organization designed to alleviate the vagaries of

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56 Libro de Actas de la Sociedad de Damas Ortodoxas (hereafter SDO), Estatutos de la Sociedad de Damas Ortodoxas, Chapter 1, Article 2, October 6, 1926, 1.

57 “Jam’iyya al-Sayidāt al-Urdhuksiyyāt fī Tūkūmān,” Ṣada al-Shaq (San Miguel de Tucumán), February 2, 1929.

58 Report of the General Account of the Orthodox Women’s Society (hereafter RGA) [Bayān al-maṣraf al-‘ām li-Jam’iyya al-Sayidāt al-Urdhuksiyyāt fī Tūkūmān], Years 1926 and 1927, 1.

59 SDO, Acta No. 70, July 26, 1928.

60 SDO, Acta No. 95, June 27, 1929.
economic depression that afflicted the province. As a result, the poorer segments were left exposed, and possessed the highest rates of arrest for aggravated assault and larceny of any national group. Family and village-based networks were critical to surviving a depressed economy and intense social dislocation. Yet, enemies of these immigrants targeted and perpetrated crimes against the most vulnerable members of these families, namely women and children. Prejudicial discourses circulated throughout Argentina; however, criminal acts did happen in specific moments. This rhetoric may also help explain why Arabic-speakers were arrested at a significantly higher clip than other immigrant groups. While the family could be targeted, the Syrian-Lebanese intellectual elites set out to define the roles and responsibilities of the family and its members.

While class identities were critical to the segmentation of the community, politics of the homeland continued to threaten fragmentation of the community. Community intellectuals and elites worked feverishly to remove old country politics from the social milieu. They succeeded in the 1920s; however, the fragmentation of the community would happen for certain in the following decade. The 1930s also represented the period in which the Syrian-Lebanese community entered into local Tucumán politics on a large scale. The commercial success of the 1920s did not translate into formal political power, yet it did allow for women of the colony, through the establishment of the soup kitchen for the unemployed, to intervene in local social policy and political politics on an unprecedented scale.
Chapter 5: “Un Trabajo Patriótico”: Political Participation, Gender, and Cultural Citizenship in 1930s Tucumán

The Great Depression and the September 6, 1930 Revolution plunged Tucumán into economic and political chaos, during which the average person experienced severe social dislocation, watched jobs evaporate, and witnessed the inability of overwhelmed state institutions to deal effectively with a surge of unemployed workers.¹ The fall of President Hipólito Yrigoyen and the subsequent federal intervention and removal of the governor in Tucumán scrambled the local political scene. In spite of these shocks, the well-to-do Syrian-Lebanese continued to integrate itself into local society while non-elite women suffered. Interpersonal violence in an environment of high rates of crimes usually

¹ Carlos Díaz Alejandro and Roberto Cortés Conde argued Argentina fared well during the worldwide depression and the years after, experiencing economic growth, especially in industry, greater than the USA and Canada. Both have little to say on unemployment, especially in the rural zones of Argentina except to point out that rural to urban migration helped the urban industrial sector expand between 1933 and 1943. The qualitative data from Tucumán suggests a dire state of affairs and is a likely cause for the spike in internal migration from the interior to the provincial capital and, later, to Buenos Aires. The collapse of the sugar economy in Tucumán sent a swell of displaced rural workers to the cities and towns of the province who formed encampments on the outskirts of these urban areas. The federal government offered free transportation to workers who willingly relocated to zones with greater employment opportunities. Carlos Díaz Alejandro, Essays on the Economic History of the Argentine Republic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 80-81, 94-105, 125; Roberto Cortés Conde, The Political Economy of Argentina in the Twentieth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 78-121.
associated with poverty and desperation. Abusive relationships led many women to seek legal remedies, such as a formal separation (*divorcio*), or to quit the marriage. The average number of divorces initiated annually between 1934 and 1942 doubled in comparison to the 1920s. The turmoil caused by economic depression and revolution gave the financially secure and politically minded of the Syrian-Lebanese colony in Tucumán the opportunity to exercise a broad cultural citizenship heretofore not possible, which emphasized their place and belonging in local society. Syrian-Lebanese merchants survived the economic crisis and grew in wealth. The colony’s intellectuals contributed to the local artistic scene, including a play commissioned by the leader of the local theatre scene. The play sought to highlight the shared concerns of middle class Argentines and Levantines. Men from the merchant and cultural elite clamored for participation in formal politics and entrance into its institutions. Yet, elite Syrian-Lebanese women made the greatest impact on local politics by aligning with the Argentine military to create welfare institutions that served unemployed workers in the depression years. Moved by the destitution of unemployed workers roaming the streets of the provincial capital, members of the Women’s Committee of the Syrian-Lebanese Society secured a facility, cookware, eating utensils, and foodstuffs to open and operate a public soup kitchen for unemployed men. These activities gave certain women a prominent role in local society and unprecedented influence in crafting social policy.

**Political Participation and Cultural Citizenship**

Recent studies have advanced our understandings of political participation and citizenship, arguing for a more subtle awareness of the ways non-traditional and non-elite
actors engage with the state and local society. Indeed, Argentina during the middle of the nineteenth century was never a “restrictive republic” in which the public was indifferent to politics. Associations, newspapers and collective mobilization, such as parades and demonstrations against the death penalty, forged a public sphere in which civil society engaged the state. While few bothered to vote, large sectors of the Buenos Aires population participated in other forms of public involvement. In the rural zones of provincial Buenos Aires, *paysanos* – wandering peons and peasants looking for jobs in the pampas or drafted into the army – negotiated with elites and the state in fields of power, in particular labor and commodity markets, the law, the military and politics. For instance, Ricardo Salvatore deftly showed federal festivities were communicative of political rituals between the state and the “people,” occasioning public displays of republicanism. These points of contact illustrated the range of strategies actors pursued in order to achieve a particular need or desire, secure employment or express a political affiliation.

By the end of the nineteenth century, increased access to voting and the creation of political parties offered new ways to express citizenship and belonging. The persistent clamoring for expanded political rights by various sectors of the Argentine polity culminated in the Sáenz Peña Act of 1912, which guaranteed universal male suffrage. Women also entered the public and political spheres as writers, activists, and

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philanthropists. A feminist movement materialized in the wake of the modernizing Argentine educational system, economy and mass immigration. Largely educated and urban, feminists closely allied themselves with anarchist and socialist groups, and advanced positions like childcare, the expansion of patria potestad (guardianship over children), prison reform, and claims for eight-hour workdays. Feminists pushed for education and training for all women and did reach out to lower class and immigrant women. Activist women circulated their ideas through the press and literary journals. For instance, Alicia Moreau de Justo during the Radical era (1916-1930) created a character Doña Juana Pueblo who represented the modern, emerging, socialist woman; a female learning to debate and participate in politics.4

If political participation encompasses more than voting rights, then citizenship is more than a bundle of rights for select members of a nation. Hence, notions of citizenship must consider the sense of belonging to and participation in local society, and move beyond narrow definitions of citizenship.5 Thomas H. Marshall argued citizenship, or full membership in a community, must include social rights in addition to the civil and political components. He asserted the judicial system safeguarded civil liberties, the electoral arrangement and political parties protected political privileges, and the


education organization and social services preserved social rights. Marshall pioneered
the concept of social rights, which he viewed as critical to the integration of working
class males into British society. Nicolletta Gullace examined the activities of educated,
urban women in London during the First World War and their demands for suffrage. The
war provided women with the opportunity to renegotiate notions of citizenship in the
form of service to the state and by undermining the historical idea that citizenship was
tied to the male body. For Gullace, the renegotiation of citizenship ended with British
women receiving the vote in 1918. Enfranchisement was perhaps an important concern
of non-elite rural and urban women; however, their economic rights might have been of
greater import, especially if their husbands and sons fought and died on the Western
front. If citizenship is more than the franchise alone and includes access to state
institutions, immigrants in Argentina possessed many claims to citizenship. The liberal
Argentine Constitution of 1853 endowed immigrants with economic rights equal to
formal citizens. The Tucumán Constitution of 1907 gave municipalities the discretion to
open elections to immigrants. Immigrants in northwestern Argentina, both male and
female, had access to municipal welfare organizations and state institutions and services.

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Current scholarship has expanded the notion of citizenship to incorporate cultural understandings of civic participation. Cultural citizenship, or the “ways people organize their values, their beliefs about their rights, and their practices” based on a shared sense of cultural identity among immigrant communities and minority groups, is a discourse of belonging in which immigrants and minorities make demands to the state while asserting a space for being different. Renato Rosaldo, who pioneered this concept, argued that claims to citizenship “are reinforced or subverted by cultural assumptions and practices.” For proponents of cultural citizenship, culture offers “a sense of belonging to a community, a feeling of entitlement, the energy to face everyday adversities, and a rationale for resistance to a larger world in which members of minority groups feel like aliens…” George Yúdice perceived that in this arrangement “politics trumps the content of culture” and becomes a “resource for politics.” The reduction of cultural...

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9 Blanca Silvestrini, “The World We Enter When Claiming Rights: Latinos and Their Quest for Culture,” *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*, William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, Editors (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 44. I am influenced by Florencia Mallon’s formulation of discourse, which goes beyond the post-modern emphasis on language. For Mallon, discourse should be seen as a “political as well as an intellectual process, because human struggles over power and meaning are intimately interconnected.” They are “the products of alliance and confrontation among human beings as they attempt to construct and own the meanings of their actions.” See Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 6, 312.


11 Blanca G. Silvestrini, “The World We Enter When Claiming Rights,” 43.

citizenship to an adversarial relationship with the host community obscures the ways immigrants successfully used their cultural identity to integrate into local society and be recognized publicly as productive members of it. At the same time, conventional understandings of cultural citizenship suggest a monolithic cultural identity. The example of the Syrian-Lebanese colony in Tucumán demonstrates that cultural citizenship is as exclusionary and bounded as the formal and legalistic notion of citizenship that the concept is designed to critique.

Supporters and critics of cultural citizenship see it as a decidedly recent phenomenon linked to the predominant neoliberal economic model. For instance, Yúdice sees cultural citizenship as “a by-product, so to speak, of the confluence of civil rights legislation, increases in immigration…, the permeation of the social by foundations and third-sector institutions specializing in welfare services, the electronic media, and the post-mass market…” Cultural citizenship, however, predates both the welfare state and its transition to a neoliberal nation. Arabic-speaking immigrants effectively used Argentine courts to protect their interests. In addition, immigrants established efficient social aid institutions and welfare services for poorer members of the community. The use of print media connected these Arabic-speaking colonies throughout the Americas with each other in addition to the homeland.

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13 Yúdice, The Expediency of Culture, 165.

14 José Moya details the social aid institutions of Spanish immigrants in Buenos Aires, but does not discuss women’s organizations. See Moya, Cousins and Strangers, 277-331.
Only recently have scholars begun to examine the role of women in the political and civic realms of modern Latin American societies. Works on women, charity, social assistance and the origins of the welfare state have primarily focused on elite women, the Catholic Church and the state’s views on and treatment of unmarried mothers and poor children, as well as the internal power dynamics between the institutions in the business of welfare.¹⁵ Both Karen Mead, in the case of Buenos Aires, and Christine Ehrick, for Uruguay, demonstrate how providing assistance to poor women and unmarried mothers expanded elite women’s public roles and linked these women to the state during the first couple of decades of the twentieth century. In each case, these elite women were eventually pushed out – by the Church in Argentina and by an emerging class of professional women in Uruguay.¹⁶ In northwestern Argentina, the Sociedad de Beneficencia de Tucumán, which received subsidies from the provincial government, created private institutions, such as hospitals, orphanages, and schools, that targeted poor women and children. These efforts and institutions were as much about disciplining and

¹⁵ See, for example, the special collection of essays from *The Americas*, Vol. 58, no. 1 (July 2001).

instilling a certain morality on the urban poor as it was in consolidating the social elites of Tucumán.\textsuperscript{17}

Elsewhere in Latin America, for instance, child welfare in Brazil was the province of families and the Church before the 1920s. Yet, by 1922, the discussion among the social and political elite had decided that the welfare of children were a marker of “modernity, progress and order.”\textsuperscript{18} In Porfirian Mexico City, the state largely left social assistance and charity to private initiatives. The state, however, increasingly intervened in the lives of poor children to “discipline, moralize, and create client-workers loyal to the patron state.”\textsuperscript{19} In revolutionary Mexico City, elite discourses shifted and new institutions emerged to create public order by removing beggars, including children, from the public view and returning them as productive workers.\textsuperscript{20} While these studies place women and children at the center of the debates surrounding the emergence and practice of welfare states, as well as political participation and the public sphere, few scholars

\textsuperscript{17} Fernández, et. al., “Esfera pública, moralidad y mujeres de la elite,” 97-110. It is unclear what impact these private institutions had on immigrant women who may have utilized the services of these organizations.


have discussed the contributions of immigrants in Latin America to the welfare state.\textsuperscript{21} Including immigrant men and women further expands the notion of political participation and citizenship in Latin America as well as contributing to our understanding of the emergence of the welfare state.

**Non-Elite Syrians and Lebanese in the Time of Depression and Revolution**

The onset of the world depression exacerbated the worsening economic situation in Tucumán, whose livelihood depended on sugar production. The provincial government had desperately tried to deal with overproduction as well as intense social unrest during the 1920s. Sugar production in Tucumán fell by thirty-six percent between 1926 and 1929, while prices for refined sugar tumbled more than twenty-five percent from January 1928 to April 1930.\textsuperscript{22} The economy spurted and stumbled, abandoning the most vulnerable residents exposed to the vagaries of the marketplace. In 1929, Governor Sortheix warned that the sugar crisis threatened to force “the closure of many factories and the abandonment of many hectares of farmland, leaving thousands of laborers without any immediate means of daily subsistence.”\textsuperscript{23} Faced with such deteriorating economic conditions, the Tucumán daily *El Orden* in January 1930 explained the state of affairs in the provincial capital:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Greenberg, “The Dictatorship of the Chimneys,” 435, 466.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Greenberg, “The Dictatorship of the Chimneys,” 438.
\end{itemize}
The people lack money... The specter of misery is closing in on Tucumán and a large part of the rest of the country. Misery advances and is accentuated with the natural dread of the humble classes that already know what [misery] means. Beef is expensive, vegetables at inaccessible prices, groceries in the clouds, impossible rental accommodation; here is a general picture of the capital. In the rest of the province, scarce cattle raising and agriculture, suffering from prolonged droughts, have caused a very critical situation that reflects the misery in all of the orders of the social economy... now the government is missing.²⁴

By August 1932, little had improved for those dependent upon the seasonal labor of the *zafra* (sugar cane harvest). *El Orden* sent a correspondent to a “City of Misery” on the outskirts of town to visit the *lingheras*, or day laborers.²⁵ The reporter observed that the slum was filled with men “eager for bread and work,” and possessed “its own floating population.”²⁶ Using pieces of wood stolen from cargo trains to build shacks, many *lingheras* stayed on site, close to the fire, while others roamed the streets “tortured by the same idea: un pedazo de pan!”²⁷ The early 1930s also witnessed violent strikes and demonstrations in provincial hamlets such as Concepción, as crimes normally associated with poverty skyrocketed during the 1930s.²⁸

²⁴ *El Orden*, January 5, 1930.

²⁵ The term *linghera*, also spelled *linyera*, is a lunfardo (colloquial) term that also gives the connotation of a vagabond. [http://www.elportaldeltango.com/lunfardo/l.htm](http://www.elportaldeltango.com/lunfardo/l.htm) (Accessed April 12, 2011).


²⁷ Ibid.

The fall of Hipólito Yrigoyen in Buenos Aires created an immediate crisis for the Radical governor Sortheix. On September 7, the head of the Fifth Army Division stationed in Tucumán met with the Governor and encouraged him to transfer power for the sake of public security. The provincial capital was paralyzed with street demonstrations condemning the government of Yrigoyen and Sortheix and pledging support for the provisional government. The military established an interim administration that functioned until Juan Luis Nougués, the former mayor of San Miguel de Tucumán, assumed the governorship in February 1932. The popular Nougués inherited a government mired in debt and an economy in tatters. He tried unsuccessfully to mediate between cañeros, or sugar cane planters, and sugar industrialists to stem over-production. In addition, Nougués attempted to reign in the public debt, while simultaneously creating public welfare programs, and passing pro-labor legislation. Collectively, these contradictory events led to his removal in June 1934 by federal intervention.

29 Nougués and his political party, the Bandera Blanca (White Flag), won the provincial elections of November 1931. The Radical Party had a national policy of abstaining from elections to protest the September 1930 coup. Páez de la Torre, La historia del Tucumán, 640-641.

30 The provincial legislature passed pro-worker legislation, such as the English Saturday and the “ley de la silla,” which required seats to be made available at all factories in the province, in December 1932. Perhaps more importantly, in February 1933 the government levied a new tax on the sugar industry for 1933-1935 harvests to pay debt (90%) and medical and social assistance (10%). The government also established the Permanent Fund for Public Works and Social and Medical Assistance in June 1933. Páez de la Torre, La historia del Tucumán, 641-642.
Many non-elite women struggled for economic survival and attempted to escape failed marriages during these years.\textsuperscript{31} For instance, Latiffe Dahan, a Syrian Jew, resorted to committing a fraudulent bankruptcy in 1931 following the death of her spouse Moisés.\textsuperscript{32} Three years later she petitioned the Tucumán courts for the reinstatement of her rights to practice commerce citing a suit brought against her by a “clever and devious” creditor.\textsuperscript{33} The courts denied her request stating the requisite three years had not passed since her conviction. Furthermore, the court disagreed with Latiffe Dahan that the current suit against her estate equated to special circumstances. She appealed this decision to the provincial Supreme Court; however, the high court upheld the original judge’s ruling.\textsuperscript{34} It is unclear what happened next to Latiffe and her family. What is clear is that the benefits of cultural citizenship were contingent upon a certain class identity and access to specific community institutions, such as the Syrian-Lebanese Society. Furthermore, access to state institutions did not equate to success, and Latiffe would have to seek aid from non-state sources.

\textsuperscript{31} Elite Syrian-Lebanese women in Buenos Aires, for instance, led the successful annual fund drives to support Syrian-Lebanese Hospital during the 1930s.


\textsuperscript{33} The Public Defender represented Latiffe Dahan. To receive this service, Latiffe had to prove her impoverished state to the Attorney General’s office, which, being satisfied, gave her a certificado de ser pobre, or Certificate of Poverty. AGPT, Caja 985, Expediente 7, “Certificado de Ser Pobre,” July 24, 1934.

\textsuperscript{34} AGPT, Caja 985, Expediente 7, “Autos y Vistas de la Corte Suprema,” June 25, 1935.
Arrest rates for sexual assault and homicide tripled between 1931 and 1936.\textsuperscript{35} Women, including non-elite Arabic-speaking women, suffered from this increase in violent behavior, in many cases from their spouses. Victims of domestic abuse had several strategies to quit abusive relationships and broken marriages, principally abandonment and legal separation. Divorce cases were rare among the Syrian-Lebanese colony; however, the proceedings that exist reveal the vulnerable position in which Arabic-speaking women lived.\textsuperscript{36}

Under Argentina’s Civil Code and Civil Matrimony Law, promulgated in 1884 and November 1888 respectively, couples had to perform a civil service and register with the state, and then could celebrate a religious wedding. Couples who wanted a civil divorce had to proceed with a legal separation that allowed for the partition of the couples and their material wealth. This legal separation, however, prohibited these people from remarrying. There were three bases for a successful legal separation: adultery, a death threat from one spouse to the other, and physical violence and \textit{malos tratos}, or persistent violence.

\textsuperscript{35} Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año 1931 (Tucumán: Imprenta M. Violetto & Cía, 1933), 183; Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año 1936 (n.p., n.d.), 184.

\textsuperscript{36} Of the 235 complaints featuring an Arabic-speaking plaintiff or defendant filed before the Third Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas between 1915 and 1942, only four divorce petitions were filed. There were four Courts of Common Pleas (Primera Instancia en lo Civil y Comercial) in Tucumán and each court had two clerks (Secretarías). It is likely additional divorce petitions exist in the indices of the additional seven clerks. Between 1934 and 1942, an average of eighty-one separation proceedings were initiated, more than double the average of thirty-nine from the 1920s.

Hassan Cadir, an unskilled laborer, petitioned for a legal separation from his Argentine wife Juana Díaz, a housewife, in June 1930 after eleven years of marriage. Cadir admitted that this was the third time that Juana had abandoned her conjugal home. In the previous events, she returned and he forgave Juana for the sake of their children. This time, however, Hassan Cadir argued that Juana’s repeated abandonment and neglect in the care of their four children revealed a poor character and infidelity to the family and proved voluntary and malicious abandonment.\footnote{AGPT, Caja 586, Expediente 9, Serie E, “Defensor de Pobres al Juez,” June 25, 1930.}

Juana’s flight seemed to be permanent because unlike previous departures, she took cash, a revolver, a gold watch, three gold rings, undergarments, a bed and its bedding.\footnote{AGPT, Caja 586, Serie E, September 9, 1931. This information comes from the police report filed by Hassan Cadir on April 22, 1930 and was then submitted to the court on September 9, 1931.} The differences between Hassan Cadir and Juana were irreconcilable. The couple’s maid testified that in the three months leading up to the departure, Juana searched for any reason to become angry with her husband. The day Juana left she
packed her things and, as she walked out, left one of her children crying in the doorway.\footnote{AGPT, Caja 586, Serie E, September 9, 1931. The statement by Rosario Herrera was filed on April 26, 1930.}

Moreover, she skipped several hearings attempting to reconcile the spouses. The presiding judge ultimately granted the divorce to Hassan Cadir and faulted Juana.\footnote{AGPT, Caja 586, Expediente 9, April 17, 1931 and February 4, 1932.}

Juana never testified and, as a result, it is impossible to determine what led her to take such a drastic step. Nevertheless, she left her children and took a firearm. It seems likely that Juana feared physical abuse, and her perception of this threat was so great that she willingly abandoned her children. Furthermore, she took valuables that she would be able to sell in order to support her flight. Born in the neighboring province of Santiago del Estero, it may be that Juana used the valuables to pay for transport to her family’s home.

Abraham Sale Ale, a vegetable seller, initiated separation proceedings in October 1935 arguing that his wife Martina Joséfa Lazarte was guilty of three acts of physical and emotional abuse.\footnote{AGPT, Caja 1704, Expediente 1, Serie E, “Defensor de Pobres al Juez,” October 19, 1935.} Ale provided witness testimony depicting Martina as a person possessing an irascible temperament, who abused him and abandoned her conjugal home.\footnote{AGPT, Caja 1704, Expediente 1, Serie E, “Audiencia,” July 3, 1936; AGPT, Caja 1704, Expediente 1, Serie E, “Audiencia,” August 16, 1937.} Martina, who was born in Beirut and worked as a servant, moved out with the help of her brother taking a bed mattress while ignoring Abraham’s pleas for her to

40 AGPT, Caja 586, Serie E, September 9, 1931. The statement by Rosario Herrera was filed on April 26, 1930.

41 AGPT, Caja 586, Expediente 9, April 17, 1931 and February 4, 1932.


Martina did present herself before the judge in November 1935 declaring that she had begun separation proceedings herself in 1932. Martina asked that the two trials be combined; a request that was denied. Following this appearance, Martina never again attended a court hearing, many of which were designed for reconciliation. After much procedural wrangling, the presiding judge ruled in favor of Abraham Sale Ale and granted the legal separation on July 13, 1938, a judgment confirmed by the appellate court in December 1938.

It is unclear why Martina desired to quit her marriage to Abraham Sale Ale. Certainly there was a gross age disparity; Abraham was forty and Martina was twenty-two at the time of their marriage in November 1931. In addition, she thought it necessary to have her brother help her move, perhaps for personal security concerns. What is clear is that threats of court and the potential of being found guilty of the union’s dissolution did not move her to participate in the trial.

María Amado de Apud and Sara Margarita Rodríguez de Isa possessed compelling reasons to seek legal separation, namely domestic violence. María Amado de Apud, an embroiderer, moved back into her parent’s home after a series of beatings by

44 AGPT, Caja 1704, Expediente 1, Serie E, “Testimonio de Abel Salomon,” August 9, 1937.


her husband Esper Makoul Apud, a baker. Her short marriage to Esper, which had produced no children, was irreconcilable. María’s complaint before the judge described how she suffered continuous physical abuse by her husband, brutally injuring her. In addition, María accused her husband of infecting her with a venereal disease, for which María showed symptoms fifteen days after their marriage and for which she continued to receive treatment. Prior to her flight, María complained to the police that Esper hid firearms in the house, prompting an investigation. In addition to legal separation, Maria wanted her husband to return various items, such as her clothes, gold jewelry, bedding, some textiles and rugs, a watch, and her bank account book.\(^48\) Esper Makoul Apud informed the judge that he only had the bedding and textiles, claiming that María had taken the jewelry when she moved out.\(^49\) The presiding judge set a hearing of reconciliation for April 7; however, before it could take place María notified the judge that she had voluntarily reconciled with her husband, and the trial ended.\(^50\)

After ten years of marriage, Sara Margarita Rodríguez de Isa initiated legal separation proceedings against her husband Juan in October 1930. In her complaint, she noted that she had left Juan in 1925 fearing he would kill her after she had openly complained about his behavior with their domestic servant. Juan asked Sara Margarita to


\(^{50}\) AGPT, Caja 1327, Expediente 11, Serie E, “Aclaración de María Amado de Apud,” April 3, 1937.
return from her sister’s home, which she only agreed to after he fired the maid. In 1927, she discovered that Juan was living “in concubinage” with another woman named María. Sara Margarita confronted her husband, who then returned and beat her severely, provoking the intervention of the police and forcing Sara Margarita to move in again with her sister and place their daughter in the grade school for orphans. Three days later, Juan Isa moved in with María for two years, with whom he had a son. At the time of Sara Margarita’s complaint, her husband was living with yet another woman who was presenting herself publicly as Juan Isa’s legitimate wife.  

Sara Margarita used the legal separation proceedings to claim her economic rights protected under the civil code governing marriage. She claimed she was entitled to a monthly stipend based upon the value of the former married couple’s property, which was appraised at 15,000 pesos, and requested eighty pesos monthly. In addition, she convinced the court to seize Juan’s property and capital assets. In spite of past violence and her success in moving the courts to seize the property of Juan, Sara Margarita accepted her husband’s offer of reconciliation and the case ended. 

These four legal separation cases from Tucumán demonstrate the desperation experienced by some men and women during a highly unstable economic period. In the sample of cases, two men and two women filed petitions for legal separation from their

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52 Ibid.

spouse. Both men claimed abandonment, whereas the women declared physical and psychological abuse. Each plaintiff sought legal recognition of their poverty and used the public defendant provided by the province to argue the cases. In each marriage, the husband was significantly older than his spouse, most likely as a result of arranged marriages. Each male plaintiff achieved a legal separation with blame assigned to his wives. The women plaintiffs ultimately agreed to reconcile with their husbands.

Donna Guy notes that women “frequently used divorce as a mechanism to end unbearable relationships” to abusive spouses. Legal separation cases show that domestic violence was a very real danger experienced by women. Husbands accused their spouses of adultery, which was difficult to prove, as a strategy to punish their wives. Accused women were incarcerated during the trial and, in the cases consulted by Guy, men ended their complaints viewing time served as punishment enough. Because of the difficulty in applying burden in cases of legal separation, individuals in a failed relationship used the legal mechanism in many instances to mete out punishment. Others simply chose abandonment.

The cases of María Amado de Apud and Sara Margarita Rodríguez de Isa are inconclusive in terms of the final outcome of the relationships with their respective spouses. The actions of these two suggest that women used the threat of legal separation to rein in abusive partners or pursue their economic rights from deadbeat spouses, thus compelling an abusive spouse to come to terms in an extrajudicial agreement, which was

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likely guaranteed by family members of the wives, such as the parents of María Amado de Apud. Moreover, the civil code subjected abusive spouses found guilty of the dissolution of marriage to the criminal code. Incarceration was a real possibility and was probably used as leverage by the women plaintiffs, a phenomenon during the late colonial and early independent eras in Buenos Aires and Montevideo observed by Silvia Mallo. It is also likely they used extrajudicial forms of dispute resolution and avoided the legal system. It is probable that the complaints by Hassan Cadir and Abraham Sale Ale did not compel their wives to appear before the judge or accept reconciliation.

56 It has been suggested that legal separation trials were only useful if guilt could be assigned to one of the parties; however, there is a long tradition in the Levant of extrajudicial dispute resolution that worked parallel to formal legal remedies. See Guy, “Volviendo del silencio”; Ergene, Local Court, Provincial Society and Justice in the Ottoman Empire.

57 “Artículo 77,” Codigo Civil y Leyes Complementarias (Buenos Aires: Editor Bibliografica Ombea, 1963), 103.


59 Silvia Mallo observed neighbors played a critical role in the divorce proceedings of the late colonial era and early independence period, aiding or hindering punishment in a divorce proceeding. Certainly, neighbors played a critical role in bolstering or undermining a divorce proceeding in 1930s Tucumán. What is less known is their role in maintaining a social order and harmony beyond the reach of the legal code. As exhibited in cases among Arabic-speaking merchants from the early twentieth century, extrajudicial dispute resolutions were reached that prevented the accused from serving jail time. It seems likely these resources remained available for women in the 1930s. Mallo, “Justicia, divorcio, alimentos y malos tratos,” 399. For contemporary studies of extrajudicial dispute resolution, please see Enrique Desmond Arias and Corinne Davis Rodrigues, “The Myth of Personal Security: Criminal Gangs, Dispute Resolution, and Identity in Rio de Janeiro’s Favelas,” Latin American Politics and Society, 48, no. 4 (2006): 53-56; Elizabeth Leeds, “Cocaine and Parallel Polities on the Brazilian Urban Periphery: Constraints on Local Level Democratization,” Latin American Research Review 31, no. 3 (1996): 61.
Abandonment and permanent separation from their husbands was seemingly more important than attempting to lay a counterclaim against their husbands for the dissolution of the conjugal relationship.

In the example of Latiffe Dahan and each of the divorce cases, these women experienced personal insecurity in the form of poverty, fear of interpersonal violence or both. As such, socioeconomic class is an important variable when assessing the immigrant experience. In certain of the cases, women achieved alternative forms of dispute resolution; however, the ultimate success of these arrangements remains unclear. For wealthier members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony, however, their concerns lay in the acceptance of local society and complete integration into cultural, social, and political elite circles. The early years of the decade proved to be opportune.

**Syrian-Lebanese Cultural Brokers and the Presentation of the Colony**

The combination of a group of talented intellectuals from the colony, the wealth and strength of the colony’s merchant class, and the growing prominence of the Syrian-Lebanese Society helped members to make connections and contribute to the local cultural scene in Tucumán. The relative size of the Arabic-speaking immigrant population and their commercial activities led to their appearance as stock characters in regional artistic works, perhaps most significantly in Pablo Rojas Paz’s novel *Hombres grises montañas azules*, published in 1930. Yet, an appreciation of their cultural value to local Tucumano society also emerged. For instance, Ramón Serrano, a Spanish playwright and artist who formed a theatrical group that was an important cultural force in Tucumán beginning in the late 1920s, asked José Guraieb to write a theatrical work
with an Eastern setting (de ambiente oriental) for presentation at the Alberdi Theatre “to benefit the Syrian-Lebanese Society.”

José Guraieb, a Christian, arrived in Tucumán in 1914, shortly after completing his baccalaureate in Arabic, French and Ottoman Turkish. He settled in the company town that surrounded the Santa Ana sugar factory in Rio Chico department, 85 kilometers south of the provincial capital, where a family member, likely his brother or cousin, ran a general store. The following year, José Guraieb published a Spanish translation of Kahlil Gibran’s “The Life of Love,” an Arabic-language short story published in his 1914 collection entitled Damʿa wa Ibtisāma (A Tear and A Smile). This marked the beginning of a career of translating Gibran by Guraieb, for which he gained acclaim. In addition to reading the literary production of his peers in North America and Brazil, Guraieb also kept abreast of the works coming out of the Levant and Egypt. This devotion to literature ultimately led to his faculty appointment at the National University of Córdoba where he taught Arabic and culture.

The example of José Guraieb demonstrates further the transnational intellectual network, the aforementioned Arabophone Republic of Letters, formed by Arabic-speaking intellectuals throughout the world. Guraieb’s wide reading of the literary works coming out of the Arab World led him to make an interesting decision regarding the request from Serrano. In response to the invitation to present a play set in the East, José

60 José E. Guraieb, Ratiba: una obra teatral (Tucumán: Casanovas y Cossio, 1932), 5

61 Saleh de Canuto, El aporte de los sirios y libaneses a Tucumán, 46-48; APJ, Registro Público de Comercio, Volume 3.
Guraieb produced the play entitled *Ratiba*, which was inspired by the Egyptian playwright Muhammad Taymur’s *al-Hāwiyya* (*The Abyss*). Muhammad Taymur was one of the most active advocates and protagonists in the development of modern theater in Egypt and the Levant. Taymur (1891-1921) came from a wealthy family of Turkish origin who had many renowned members in the world of arts and letters. Educated in France during World War I, he actively attended the French theatre. Upon his return to Egypt, Taymur joined the acting group Jamʿiyyat Anṣār al-Tamthīl (Society for Promoting Acting) that translated English plays for the Egyptian theater. Taymur wrote three plays and at least forty articles assessing the history and development of French and Egyptian drama and critical reviews of Egyptian playwrights and performers. He finished his last play, considered to be his best, *al-Hāwiyya* in 1921, but was not brought to stage until the year following his untimely death.62 Guraieb noted in the introduction to his play that he read Taymur’s work in 1922 and, although he never intended to read the play anew, the main argument “remained recorded in [his] mind” and he was committed to adapting it the “modern theatre.” He admitted that his work was indebted to Taymur and his play, without which he would not have been able to create *Ratiba* for a Spanish-speaking audience.63

*Ratiba* is set in contemporary Cairo and focused on the upper echelon of Egypt and the generational divide of social values and practices of a society in transition. The protagonists are Amin, an idealistic yet idle upper class male who views himself as the


embodiment of modernity, and his wife Ratiba, who is from a lower class family and the embodiment of her spouse’s progressive nature. These two interact with Amin’s mother and uncle who together attempt to prevent him from selling off his inheritance in property to support his cocaine habit. The other two important characters are Amin’s friends Mukhdi and Schafik. Mukhdi shares his friend’s cocaine addiction and his propensity for prostitutes. Schafik, however, attempts to fuel Amin’s drug habit by fleecing him of his properties for pennies on the dollar while designing an elaborate plan to seduce his wife Ratiba. The play climaxes with Amin, fueled by cocaine and the revelation of Schafik’s attempts on his wife, suffocating Ratiba and then dying himself from an overdose.

The commissioning of the play *Ratiba* by Serrano, the dean of theatre in Tucumán, was evidence of an appreciation and respect for the Arabic-speaking cultural elite and their contribution to local artistic endeavors. The Syrian-Lebanese colony in Tucumán had staged plays, mostly in Arabic, since the end of the second decade of the twentieth century. In recognition of this cultural vibrancy of this immigrant community, Ramón Serrano was interested in presenting an opportunity to the colony to introduce its homelands to Tucumán society on its own terms.

Secondly, the choice of adapting Taymur’s *al-Hāwīyya* connected the Levant and Argentina in interesting ways. José Guraieb specifically chose a play that concerned issues with which Argentines of similar sensibilities would identify immediately and directly. Social reformers in the eastern Mediterranean and the South Atlantic were preoccupied with the perceived ills of modernity, such as the decadence of the upper classes, crime and migration, female sexuality and social change. Guraieb was educated
at missionary schools in Tartus (Syria) and Beirut.\(^\text{64}\) He was surely exposed to the positivist ideas advocated by the American missionaries as well as the writings of Jurji Zaydan, an intellectual from Beirut who later moved to Cairo and founded in 1892 the influential journal *al-Hilāl*. Zaydan argued that there were three classes of people – the distinguished elite, the undistinguished general public and an emerging intellectual class, the latter being a critical agent of social transformation.\(^\text{65}\) The appearance of new social groups (most of which Zaydan would have lumped in the general population class) in Beirut and the surrounding mountain villages, such as refugees, “factory girls,” and return migrants from the mahjar, produced new gender roles, marriage patterns, life expectations, and women’s increased presence in the public sphere.\(^\text{66}\)

In response to these new actors, intellectuals played an important part in the emergence of a “discourse of urban sanitation that conflated cleanliness, social behavior, and public hygiene,” and the creation of new institutions used to intervene in the lives of urban dwellers on behalf of public health. As Jens Hannsen observed: “up until the emergence on the scene of lower middle-class nationalists in the 1930s, intellectuals [in Beirut] shared with wealthy merchants and reform-minded notables certain perspectives


\(^\text{65}\) Although Zaydan limited his thoughts to Beirut, I would assert that this was a phenomenon manifesting throughout the principal cities of the Arab Ottoman provinces, if not the empire.

on urban life, lifestyles, social values, and pedagogies.” As a result, new professionals and officials, such as public hygienists, materialized to contend with novel social actors and the problems associated with them. For instance, these hygienists, called a “new face of French imperialism” by Hanssen, articulated a sexualized discourse of the “Oriental” to explain the spread of tuberculosis. Women’s sexuality increasingly came to be regarded as a public health concern, and as a result prostitution was ultimately regulated in 1931.

Argentina experienced similar troubles associated with modernity. Argentines struggled to cope with the influx of people and the attendant problems associated with the process of modernization, such as worker unrest, rising crime rates, and unstable housing arrangements. The large influx of immigrants coincided with the increasing presence of women in the public sphere, which produced a variety of responses and discourses from social and political elites. Indeed, Argentine intellectuals were fearful of active women, which gave rise to a number of treatises denouncing women’s deviance. This fear also gave rise to the stock character of the prostitute in Argentine fiction that, in the words of Francine Masiello, offered “a body coterminous with the circulation of money,” thus

67 Hanssen, Fin-de-Siecle Beirut, 17.

68 Hanssen, Fin-de-Siecle Beirut, 115, 121-136.


commodifying the female body.\textsuperscript{71} This literary discourse appeared at the same time that institutions and public health officials in Argentina received new mandates to intrude in the lives of residents. Like Lebanon, officials concerned themselves with female sexuality and public morality, linking the vitality of the nation to these issues.\textsuperscript{72}

Prostitution in Argentina was linked to cabarets (milongas) where people danced the tango. These venues featured a novel social space in which people of various social and economic classes intermingled through music and dance. A variety of consumers of sexual commerce, including upper class men in search of adventure and excitement, as well as urban laborers, sailors and the like, were patrons of these entertainment houses. In fact, the conflation of prostitution and these dance halls was so absolute that the city of Buenos Aires banned women from working as servers in cafes, restaurants and nightclubs. This underside to modernity produced the phenomenon of idling niñ\~os bien, or upper class youth who were perceived to indulge in the excesses of modernity, such as sexual commerce and drug consumption. For Muhammad Taymur, Amin was the Egyptian equivalent. Hence, the preoccupation of José Guraieb’s play with the scourge of drug abuse, wayward upper-class men, and female sexuality would have been immediately identifiable to audiences in Tucumán.\textsuperscript{73}

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\textsuperscript{71} Masiello, \textit{Between Civilization and Barbarism}, 115.

\textsuperscript{72} Guy, \textit{Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires}, 37-104, 141-179.

\textsuperscript{73} In fact, the editors of the daily \textit{El Orden} commented on a scandalous evening altercation between niñ\~os bien, who were accompanied by women of mal vivir (ill repute), and the police in San Miguel de Tucumán. \textit{See El Orden} (San Miguel de Tucumán), September 9, 1915.
\end{flushleft}
Ratiba demonstrated how both the South Atlantic and the eastern Mediterranean connected to the transnational drug trade and global fears of pandemic abuse. Cocaine had experienced a meteoric rise in the late nineteenth century as scientists discovered its use as an anesthetic for surgical procedures and clever entrepreneurs created a variety of tonics, such as Vin Mariani and Coca Cola, designed to help people cope with the pace of modern life. Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, the U.S. government led a global crusade to ban cocaine because of its potential for abuse by society. It is unclear how the illegal trafficking in cocaine affected different areas of the world following 1920, when the drug was prohibited in the U.S. The fears associated with it continued to inspire artists and confirm the dread among those convinced of social decay.

In Egypt, the use of marijuana and cocaine was certainly the result of British colonialism. Taymur’s play condemned cocaine consumption as an elite delicacy that undermined an idyllic past perceived by educated Egyptians. In Argentina, references to cocaine use abounded in tango lyrics, such as “Maldito Tango” (1916), “Griseta” (1924), “Micifuz” (1927), “Noches de Colón” (1926), “A media luz” (1925), and “Tiempo Viejos” (1926). The use of cocaine as a metaphor asserted a variety of social uses of the drug. In certain scenarios, cocaine was a drug showcasing refinement, as in “Griseta,” “Micifuz” and “Noches de Colón.” In others, tangueros sang of cocaine as an example of ills of modern life and nostalgia for a bygone era when men were men, such as “Tiempo Viejos.”

74 While Paul Gootenberg makes the claim that cocaine’s prohibition in 1920 did mostly eliminate it as an abusable drug within the U.S., it is unclear what effect this policy had on dispersing illicit cocaine to places like Spain and Argentina. For a perceptive discussion of cocaine as a commodity, see Paul Gootenberg, Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 215.
Central to Taymur’s play and Guraieb’s retelling was the role of Ratiba, a metaphor for modern women and the primary example of a society experiencing intense transformation. The differing fates of Ratiba in Taymur and Guraieb’s versions are striking. In Muhammad Taymur’s telling, it is only Amin who tragically dies; whereas in Guraieb’s version both Ratiba and Amin meet an untimely death. The discourse surrounding women in Argentina and modern life probably affected Guraieb’s disposition. In fact, in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, “the masculine imagination [in Argentina] indentified women with subversion.”75 Argentine intellectuals, such as Francisco Sicardi, Manuel Gálvez, and Roberto Arlt, wrote treatises and novels about independent women and the deleterious effects that they had on society. Although these writers represented a variety of political opinions, they each possessed a pronounced fear of independent women and observed a so-called inequality of male-female relationships in contemporary Argentina.76 As a result, Argentine writers produced a new morality, a respectability, which sought to reinforce elite notions of proper behavior, “serve the needs of the state”, and sanction the “prominence of the upper classes against the deleterious effects of women and working-class sectors.”77 Guraieb directly identified with this respectability in Argentina and its preoccupation with social


75 Masiello, Between Civilization and Barbarism, 7.

76 Guy, Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires, 161-171.

77 Masiello, Between Civilization and Barbarism, 142-143.
decadence. Furthermore, this allowed Guraieb to connect Argentine concerns with similar issues affecting his homeland in general and Egypt in particular, illustrating a common ground among like-minded people. In addition, Guraieb was speaking indirectly to his immigrant community on what not to do and how not to behave. The ills of modernity – illicit drugs and wayward women – were a real threat to Syrian-Lebanese immigrants individually and communally. This attempt at outlining a set of acceptable normative behaviors was simply a continuation of actions Arabic-speaking elites had been doing over the course of the previous three decades primarily through the immigrant press.

In addition to José Guraieb, several first generation immigrants participated in institutions and events with the Tucumán elite. Antonio Eleas and Pedro N. Estofan, both Christians, were friends of Guraieb, and in the case of Eleas, a business partner. Eleas, as discussed earlier, was a well-educated son of an Ottoman bureaucrat who published academic works on philology and the interconnections between Arabic and Spanish. It is likely that Eleas had been a long time member of the Sarmiento Society, the premier cultural institution in Tucumán. By 1935, Eleas began serving as a member of the Society’s Advisory Board. Estofan, born in Tucumán, but educated in Beirut, became an acclaimed poet in Tucumán circles, publishing his work into the 1960s.

Participation by José Guraieb, his peers and the second generation in the cultural life of northwestern Argentina were different in intent and context. Guraieb and his peers were mostly concerned with their position in local society and worked to present the community in a manner understandable to Tucumanos. For Víctor Massuh and his
generation, their place in Argentine society was secure because their point of reference was Argentina. Matriculating through the local education system instilled a perspective that was distinct from their parents. Yet, the success in cultural and political pursuits was supported by the strength and prominence of the Syrian-Lebanese merchant class.

**Calls for Formal Political Participation**

While the Syrian-Lebanese colony continued to be an economic force during the 1930s and in the face of increasing internal fragmentation, several intellectuals within the community began to advocate for the colony’s formal participation in local politics. Heretofore, neither an Arabic-speaking immigrant nor their children had achieved a position of elected office in the Province of Tucumán. This is not to say that members of the colony did not have contact with powerful members of the political elite. Instead, it seems that members of the colony had not penetrated the political party apparatus. This lay in stark contrast to successful examples of Arabic-speaking politicians in the neighboring provinces of Salta, Jujuy and Santiago del Estero. Nevertheless, in the waning months of the Radical government in 1930, calls for formal political participation began.

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78 Rosendo Allub, a Greek Orthodox Christian, served in the provincial legislature of Santiago del Estero in the 1920s and 1930s and was a *dirigente* (political boss) of the local Radical Party. By 1933, Faiek Yapur, a Greek Orthodox Christian, was a City Councilor in the provincial capital of San Salvador de Jujuy, and Nacif Duna had already served at least one term as City Councilor in Salta. “Una figura destacada de nuestra Colonia es D. Rosendo Allub,” *al-Mahjar*, August 24, 1933; “La colectividad sírio-libanesa de Salta realiza una obra eficaz por el prestigio y bienestar de nuestros compatriotas,” *al-Mahjar*, March 1, 1934; “Nuestra Constitución en Jujuy,” *al-Mahjar*, March 1, 1934.
In the winter of 1930, Antonio Bichara and Pedro Nacip Estofan, editors of a periodical entitled *al-Hurriyya (Liberty)*, initiated a campaign that advocated the Syrian-Lebanese colony become an active, engaged, and unified political grouping. Bichara and Estofan were longtime friends who served as officers in the then dormant United Youth Society. In the early 1920s, Bichara was the association’s newspaper editor and Estofan served as the group’s president and a regular contributor to the periodical. By this time, much of their focus had shifted from the politics of the homeland to concerns in Tucumán. Hence, these men called for the unification of the provincial Radical party and encouraged it to tap the naturalized Arabic-speaking immigrants. Bichara and Estofan argued that the Syrian-Lebanese colony was a disorganized political bloc because the local political bosses had paid little attention to it. The editors confronted the rumor that the bloc was not able to vote and declared it “rare to find a compatriot of ours who does not have his citizenship card.” Furthermore, a phalanx of Arabic-speaking immigrants participated in the March 2, 1930 parliamentary elections, most of whom supported Yrigoyenista branch of the Radical Party, and “perhaps pushed the election in favor of the triumphant party.” The editors concluded that the colony, in order to be heard on their own terms, needed to actively contact and engage these political bosses.  

On August 5, 1930, Bichara and Estofan issued a call to arms in support of the Radical Party, which was under siege by a unified opposition at the national and provincial level. The editors noted that the goal of overthrowing President Hipólito Yrigoyen formed the sole commonality of the political parties that made up the

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79 “La colectividad sirio-libanesa como agrupación política,” *al-Hurriyya*, July 16, 1930. This periodical was published in both Arabic and Spanish.
opposition. Bichara and Estofan declared that now was the time for the Syrian-Lebanese colony to support Radicalism. They pointed out that the social situation of the Arabic-speaking immigrant group had improved during the period of Radical rule, which began nationally in 1916 and in Tucumán in 1917. Furthermore, the intellectuals, who emerged in the colony and contributed to its cultural and political prestige, were a product of a democratic spirit and the Radical platform.\(^{80}\) A more detailed and direct article concerning the position of the Syrian-Lebanese colony in the world of Tucumán politics appeared in the Arabic section. Although large in numbers and material wealth, the colony had been ineffective in the realm of politics because it was neither prepared nor organized.\(^{81}\) Moreover, the editors noted on the subject of politics members of the colony quarreled among themselves in spite of holding a prominent place in political circles. Bichara and Estofan concluded that the colony had a “sacred obligation” (\textit{al-wâjib al-muqaddas}) to participate in the political destiny of their adopted homeland.\(^{82}\)

These demands for political participation faded in the aftermath of the overthrow of Hipólito Yrigoyen on September 6, 1930, the subsequent deposing of Governor José Sortheix the following day, and its attendant political uncertainty. As the political situation in Tucumán stabilized with the ascension to the governorship by Juan Luis Nougués in February 1932, public intellectuals from the Syrian-Lebanese colony began to renew the call for formal political participation. For instance, José Rechmani, a former

\(^{80}\) “La colectividad sirio-libanesa y el radicalismo,” \textit{al-Hurriyya}, August 5, 1930.


\(^{82}\) Ibid.
officer of the United Youth Society and publisher of the periodical _al-Mahjar_, revived the appeal for political participation in late winter of 1932. He noted that the colony prided itself in representing nearly forty percent of the province’s commercial activities and that it was evident the community could not and should not remain indifferent to the current political environment.\(^{83}\) The call to political action by Rechmani coincided with the most successful intervention into local politics, which was organized and led by elite women of the Syrian-Lebanese colony.

**Immigrant Women, Charity and Cultural Citizenship**

On a chilly evening in July 1932, Alcira Malouf de Saad walked home from the cinema with her husband Selim. As they arrived at their house, two young men of “good appearance” were waiting at the door. These men implored the Saads for a _pedazo de pan_, or a piece of bread, to which the Saad family complied. Alcira could not sleep; the image of these robust men begging for food haunted her during the evening.\(^{84}\) In the morning, she spoke with Selim and decided that she would establish a _comedor popular_, or public soup kitchen, for the unemployed who ambled through the streets of the provincial capital.\(^{85}\)

Alcira and several of her friends immediately created the _Comisión de Damas_ (Ladies’ Commission) of the Syrian-Lebanese Society, and arranged, publicized, opened

\(^{83}\) “Los residentes sirios y libaneses y sus deberes y derechos civiles,” _al-Mahjar_, September 1, 1932.

\(^{84}\) “Brazos fraternalmente abierto, se extendieron el domingo pasado, hacia los desvalidos, en la Sociedad Sirio-Libanesa de Tucumán,” _Ṣada al-Sharq_, August 6, 1932.

\(^{85}\) “En el local de la Sociedad Sirio-libanesa se inauguró el comedor para desocupados,” _La Gaceta_, August 1, 1932.
and operated a public soup kitchen. Within one week, these ladies organized donations from small and large commercial houses from the Arabic-speaking collective, secured the plates and utensils from the Argentine military, and coordinated the use of the Syrian-Lebanese Society’s facility. With only 100 prepared meals, they provided for more than 300 hungry, unemployed men their “daily bread.” Alcira de Saad and her fellow committee members were Maronite Catholics who consistently used a Christian vernacular to help explain why they decided to open the soup kitchen.\footnote{Press accounts and supporters of these efforts also employed this argot. See, \textit{inter alia}, “Es realmente digna de aplauso la obra que la colectividad sirio-libanesa de Tucumán está realizando en favor de los desocupados,” \textit{La Razón} (Buenos Aires), August 21, 1932 and “Brazos fraternalmente abierto, se extendieron el domingo pasado, hacia los desvalidos, en la Sociedad Sirio-libanesa de Tucumán,” \textit{Ṣada al-Sharq}, August 6, 1932.} The Ladies’ Commission invited Tucumán’s political and social elite to inaugurate this humanitarian accomplishment. The attending guests included Governor Juan Luis Nougués, Tucumán’s Mayor Luciano Irrazábal, and the local military commander Major Eduardo M. Menchaca.

The soup kitchen became a rousing success and launched Alcira into the provincial and national spotlight. She held public conferences, was invited to join elite Argentine women’s associations, gave interviews for print media and the radio, and counseled local politicians on public policy. The success and celebrity of Alcira’s actions are even more impressive considering that she was a first-generation Christian immigrant from Mount Lebanon who did not hold Argentine citizenship.\footnote{Selim Saad came from a prominent Maronite Catholic family; however, it is unclear whether or not Alcira or Selim participated in any great degree with the Maronite Church in Tucumán. The Maronite Church had established a place of worship in Buenos}
efforts demonstrate that citizenship is much more than a legal status or a set of rights and obligations.

Donna Guy has examined the efforts of Jewish women in Buenos Aires to establish orphanages, day cares and a kindergarten for abandoned and poor children from the community, as well as Jewish refugees of the world wars. These efforts had two complementary effects. First, these activities were presented and understood to promote Jewish solidarity while reinforcing the position of these women – who organized events in conjunction with their spouses – within the Jewish community. Second, these labors fostered levels of acceptance by elite Argentine society and created links with state institutions. What was different about Alcira’s soup kitchen is that it did not target members of the Arabic-speaking community, but rather the numerous unemployed male population, who roamed the streets of Tucumán in 1932. Consistent with the efforts of Jewish women in Buenos Aires, Alcira and the Ladies’ Commission of the Syrian-Lebanese Society galvanized the community and created important links with local society and government.

On the initial day of the soup kitchen, Alcira hosted a separate ceremony to commemorate the event featuring the leading members of the Arabic-speaking immigrant community as well as the political elite. Governor Juan Luis Nougués declared that the soup kitchen was “a magnificent demonstration of the generosity of a foreign collectivity,

Aires by 1903 and had a priest ministering to Maronites in Tucumán before the outbreak of World War I.


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[that is] very intimately linked to our lives, [and] has successfully identified with us."

The Governor ended his impromptu speech by promising material aid from the government to the *comedor*. Major Eduardo M. Menchaca, responsible for donating the utensils, plates, cups and cookware, promised to continue his moral and material support. The opening of the soup kitchen was so unusual, but at the same time so important, that radio stations in other provinces broadcasted the event. As the commemoration ended, one observer commented, “the Ladies’ Commission has not petitioned help from anyone of the attendees at the inauguration; however, we understand that all authorities and private citizens are in the undeniable duty to contribute to a work so pure and so noble that it was said to be an emanation of that miracle at Capernaum.”

The Christian discourse, including the specific reference to Jesus’ miracle, used in describing the soup kitchen allowed the larger Tucumán society, in particular the elites, to recognize and identify with this act of welfare by an immigrant group. Local Tucumán society knew a Christian gesture when it saw it.

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89 “Brazos fraternalmente abierto, se extendieron el domingo pasado, hacia los desvalidos, en la Sociedad Sirio-libanesa de Tucumán,” *Ṣada al-Sharq*, August 6, 1932.

90 “Fue un acto imponente y altamente hermoso el que realizó la L. Libanesa,” *El Orden*, August 1, 1932.

91 “Brazos fraternalmente abierto, se extendieron el domingo pasado, hacia los desvalidos, en la Sociedad Sirio-libanesa de Tucumán,” *Ṣada al-Sharq*, August 6, 1932.

92 It is important to note alms for the poor is a pillar of Islam. The act of generosity would have immediately been recognized and supported – and indeed was – by the Muslim community in Tucumán even if the discourse used may have been different.
The immediate success of the soup kitchen produced derivative effects and set into motion a range of actors and activities surrounding the plight of the impoverished in Tucumán. Almost immediately, the editorial board of the Tucumán daily *La Gaceta* challenged other immigrant associations and Argentine mutual aid societies to follow Alcira’s lead. The paper pointed out that if each organization opened a comedor once a week, then these numerous *desocupados*, or the unemployed, of Tucumán could get a daily meal. *La Gaceta*’s editors argued that these hypothetical soup kitchens would be beautiful examples “of human solidarity, practiced in the heat of the palpitations of the National Constitution’s preamble,” that decidedly and disinterestedly “protects all men of good will that desire to inhabit the Argentine land.”

Moreover, the paper praised the Argentine patriotism of the Arabic-speaking colony. The editorial called upon the Spanish, Italian, and German communities, the Argentine Society of Worker’s Mutual Aid, and the French Society, in light of the Syrian-Lebanese example, to “prolong the humanitarian and patriotic work… in an act of abnegation and human solidarity.” Some heeded the call. By mid-August, the Salvation Army’s mission in Tucumán announced that it would operate a comedor three times a week and asked for donations. The editors of *El Orden* encouraged local merchants to follow the example of the “comercio sirio” (the Syrian-Lebanese merchant

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94 Ibid., my emphasis.
community) and donate to the Salvation Army.\footnote{“Ejército de Salvación inaugurará en breve los comedores populares,” \textit{El Orden}, August 16, 1932.} In addition, the Centro Femenino Pellegrini, which was a club for \textit{damas} (ladies) from the best \textit{familias Tucumánas}, decided to run a soup kitchen for two days weekly after consulting with Alcira and subsequently securing the use of the facilities of the Syrian-Lebanese Society. Around the same time, Tucumán Broadcasting invited Alcira to explain how she organized a public soup kitchen in just a few days and to solicit the assistance of institutions and wealthy individuals.\footnote{“Les ofrecerá comida dos días mas por semana en Centro Carlos Pellegrini,” \textit{La Gaceta}, August 15, 1932.} In response, the Pan-Islamic Association donated 200 pesos to help sustain the comedor. Alcira helped organize soup kitchens at the Syrian-Lebanese Society and the \textit{Centro Social de Socorros Mutuos} (Social Center of Mutual Aid) by the end of August 1932.\footnote{“Siguen funcionando los comedores para obrero desocupados,” \textit{La Gaceta}, August 31, 1932.}

Not only did many of Tucumán’s civil institutions contribute to the effort, but also the local and provincial governments. Governor Nougués, Mayor Irrazabal and other public officials who visited the comedor were stunned by the work of the Arabic-speaking women immigrants. These functionaries promised official imitation of these efforts and established other soup kitchens in strategic locations.\footnote{“Realmente digna de aplauso la obra que la colectividad sirio-libanesa de Tucumán está realizando en favor de los desocupados,” \textit{La Razón}, August 21, 1932. \textit{La Razón} pointed out that up to this moment no serious government effort has materialized.} The Argentine military based in Tucumán opened “canteens for children” on the campuses of public
schools in the provincial capital. On September 23, Mayor Irrazábal, accompanied by Alcira and city councilmen, inaugurated the municipal *comedor popular*, public soup kitchen.

While these soup kitchens served an immediate purpose, many viewed this arrangement as untenable in the long term. Ing. Benjamin J. Parmele, President of the political party Pro Tucumán, called for a committee of unemployed workers to create make-work programs like the WPA and CCC crafted in the United States. In late September, *La Gaceta*’s editorial board argued that it was time to move away from comedores and similar forms of charity. All the donations, organizational efforts, and supplies that went to the soup kitchens could have been invested in make-work projects. The board rejected charity, explaining, “work is what the unemployed want.”

Alcira continued her charitable works well into the decade, including a very public and successful campaign for the local hospitals. The economic malaise affecting the province led to tremendous shortfalls in the budgets of public institutions. Alcira and her colleagues spearheaded a charitable drive collecting funds and supplies such as blankets, pillowcases, and medical items like gauze for the public hospitals of San

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101 “Realmente digna de aplauso la obra que la colectividad siriolibanesa de Tucumán está realizando en favor de los desocupados,” *La Razón*, August 21, 1932.

Miguel de Tucumán. These women had earned wide respect for their efforts in mobilizing the Syrian-Lebanese colony and establishing a public soup kitchen for the unemployed in 1932. When the local press publicized the tragedy besetting the municipal hospitals, the Ladies Commission of the Syrian-Lebanese Society met with the mayor of San Miguel de Tucumán on August 1, 1934 and inquired into what supplies were needed to offset budgetary constraints. Armed with this information, the campaign commenced and continued through the spring of 1934, during which the press related the ladies’ progress, which culminated with a public ceremony in late December. The list of contributors included a wide variety of commercial institutions, industrial outfits and private individuals such as Gath y Chaves (the famed department store in Buenos Aires that had a branch in San Miguel de Tucumán), four sugar refineries, three banks, a public utility, a brewery, employees of the railroad companies servicing Tucumán, and Christian, Jewish and Muslim men and women from the colony.103

The campaign was a resounding success and led to more public appreciation and praise for Alcira and the women from the Syrian-Lebanese Society. In addition, the charitable drive on behalf of public hospitals further ingrained the public perception of

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the Syrian-Lebanese colony as a benevolent member of local society, at least among the social and political elites of the province and those who benefitted from services at these facilities. These publicized efforts on behalf of the poor and public institutions must have had a positive effect on creating a recognizable identity of generosity that Syrian-Lebanese merchants and ambitious politicians could capitalize on later in the decade. These activities by Alcira and the Ladies Commission coincided with an increasing participation by colony members in important Argentine social institutions and cultural life.

The efforts of Alcira Malouf de Saad and her peers challenged conventional notions of citizenship, political participation, the emergence of the welfare state, and the role of women in these issues. Her actions galvanized large sectors of an immigrant group that cut across class lines, and religious and political differences. The comedor’s success and journalistic praise of Alcira’s labors inspired and provoked other groups in San Miguel de Tucumán and the nation to create social programs, even moving provincial politicians to address the issue of unemployment and to seek solutions.

Much of the scholarship on the welfare state in Latin America demonstrates how elite women were marginalized as different institutions or new social groups claimed responsibility for the welfare of poor women and children. Alcira’s case is different because she gave assistance not to fellow Arabic-speaking immigrant women or children, but to Argentine workers and children. The comedor’s success was a source of pride for this immigrant community. Alcira inspired multiple sectors of local Tucumán society, including the political elite, to act on behalf of impoverished and unemployed workers.
Equally fascinating is Alcira’s partnership with the leader of the local military garrison; her husband Selim was one of the largest wholesalers in the province and could have supplied the military with foodstuffs.

**Conclusion**

The 1930s began with the Great Depression and the military coup, ousting the democratically elected national and provincial governments. In spite of the economic and political turmoil, members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony struggled to survive while others flourished culturally and socially in the 1930s. The economic malaise of Tucumán presented certain members of the colony an opportunity to perform a cultural citizenship that achieved widespread public recognition and integrated women of the community into social policy debates. This social belonging and celebration of the Syrian-Lebanese colony, however, was the purview of the elites. Municipal, provincial and civil society leaders sought out Alcira’s advice in the mechanics of establishing a *comedor*. This burgeoning social cachet led her to be invited to join the most elite social clubs for the ladies of Tucumán’s elite. Alcira and her friends from the Comisión de Damas were at the nexus of grass-roots activism and public policy. This fact demands an expanded notion of political participation and citizenship. Moreover, citizenship should be viewed as more than a bundle of rights and obligations. It is more than a legal status. It is a cultural practice and a process. Citizenship is contingent and contested. In addition, citizenship is more than a rights-based or needs-based relationship with the state. What people – men, women, and immigrants – also offer to state institutions and society at large is an important component of citizenship. Alcira’s efforts provoked larger
sociopolitical actions. The derivative effects were multi-layered and integrated these women into policy debates about public welfare.

At the close of the 1930s, this initial generation gave way to their children, many of whom were graduating from Argentine universities and working in the liberal professions. The emergence and ascension to power of Juan Domingo Perón presented many first- and second-generation immigrants with avenues to political power seemingly unavailable just a decade earlier. At the same time, the politics of the homeland continued to animate the internal life of the colony and create strong divisions.
In a break with national party policy, the Tucumán branch of the Radical Party decided to contest the provincial elections scheduled for December 1934. Miguel Campero beat out fellow Radical Eudoro Aráoz and the Concordancia candidate José Padilla to earn his second term as governor and assumed office in February 1935. Once in office, Campero reorganized the province’s finances and marked a decided course to arrest the economic slide the province had experienced since the depression earlier in the decade. The provincial government initiated a sustained series of public works between 1935 and 1939 to develop infrastructure and provide much needed jobs. The projects constructed more than 200 kilometers of road and built bridges throughout the province. In compliance with a national law, the construction of telephone lines connected Tucumán with Buenos Aires, other provinces, and countries abroad. The government established the Provincial Board of Tourism and the Provincial Parks Commission in 1936 to develop what it hoped would be a promising sector of the regional economy. In his 1937 address to the provincial Legislature, the governor proclaimed that public services, principally medical and social assistance, education and police security, had been augmented and the problem of unemployment had finally been resolved. By
December 1938, the Campero administration had invested nearly 8 million pesos in public works projects. The provincial legislature passed a minimum wage for workers in 1939 to complement the executive branch’s initiatives.¹

The work of Miguel Campero’s administration brought economic stability, if not sustained growth. Fellow Radical Miguel Critto succeeded Campero in the beginning of 1939 and continued the public works projects started by the previous administration. Critto’s administration invested more than 9 million pesos in public works, which included the impressive construction of the 141-kilometer road through the Andes Mountains that linked Acheral to Amaicha via Tafi del Valle. In addition, there was a very public “cultural renaissance” in Tucumán in 1939. Alfredo Coviello led and helped establish the intellectual group Septentrión, and he also published the widely acclaimed journal *Sustancia*, which advocated and fostered the vibrancy of the provincial cultural scene.²

¹ The Radical Party in Tucumán divided into two camps. A group of political parties, known as the Concordancia, coalesced around President Augustín P. Justo (r. 1932-1938). The National Democrats (“mostly regional oligarchs”), the Anti-Personalist Radicals (members who had split from Yrigoyen in 1924), and the Independent Socialists (party that split from the Socialist Party in 1927) represented the three most important political parties in the Concordancia. Páez de la Torre, *La historia de Tucumán*, 649-655; David Rock, “Argentina, 1930-1946,” *Argentina since Independence*, Leslie Bethell, editor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 180-181.

² Páez de la Torre, *La historia de Tucumán*, 655-658. Alfredo Coviello was a prominent figure in Tucumán’s cultural and political life. He was the Secretary of Finance and Public Works for the provincial capital from 1927 to 1929. In 1931, he was named Treasurer of the National University of Tucumán. While there, he helped organize the Colleges of Biochemistry and Law and Social Sciences, as well as the Department of Regional Studies. Among other activities, he served as president of the Sarmiento Society, where he launched their cultural journal *Anales*, and at the time of his
The political and economic stability that was a hallmark of the Campero and Critto administrations unfortunately did not last long. The 1942 elections to succeed Critto featured a deeply divided Radical Party. Three Radical branches coalesced around the candidacy of Miguel Campero for a third term. A fourth Radical group supported Roque Raúl Aragon. The ascendant conservative party National Democratic Party (Partido Demócrata Nacional), which had defeated the Radicals earlier in provincial legislative elections, nominated Dr. Adolfo Piossek for governor. Although Campero won the popular vote, he lost to Piossek in the Electoral College. The Electoral College met in September 1942 to sort out the election in a climate of violence, which featured “direct interventions of [political party] members and [their] supporters.”

The political unrest caused the federal government to intervene in the Electoral College on September 26, 1942. By the fall of 1943, the issue had not resolved itself and provoked the intervention of the entire province by President Ramón Castillo. Tucumán did not return to democratic rule following the military coup of June 1943, which led to the immediate handover of provincial control from the federal government to the military. A succession of interim supervisors (interventores) governed Tucumán until the provincial and national elections of February 1946, which ushered in Carlos Domínguez.

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3 Páez de la Torre, La historia de Tucumán, 660-661. Piossek garnered twenty-six electoral votes, Campero won twenty-five, and the other Radical, Aragón, earned two.
of the Labor Party (Partido Laborista) to the governorship and marked the resounding national victory for Juan Domingo Perón.⁴

Members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony continued to pursue strategies to integrate into local society, find work, meet needs and raise families. Residents of Tucumán, however, lived in an environment of personal insecurity. Felony crime rates rose well into the late 1930s as the economy struggled to produce enough jobs. Prosecutions for homicide remained static, though elevated. Prosecutions for larceny ebbed and flowed, and increased dramatically for aggravated assault, remaining high until the controversial election of Adolfo Piossek in 1942. From 1934 to 1942, Syrian and Lebanese residents in Tucumán were more likely than Spaniards and Italians to be prosecuted for homicide and aggravated assault. The economic uncertainty also touched the wealthiest members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony, and provoked a legal battle between two giants of this commercial class. Yet, Syrian and Lebanese merchants returned to prosperity, resuming its place as the second wealthiest national group in Tucumán by 1937. This return coincided with a deliberate call by Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals for formal participation in local party politics and elections. Immigrant politicians benefited from their positions as prominent merchants as well as from the goodwill earned by the efforts of Alcira Malouf de Saad and her peers from the Ladies Commission of the Syrian-Lebanese Society. As a result, Syrian-Lebanese immigrants successfully entered into political party apparatuses and ultimately won seats in the

⁴ Páez de la Torre, *La historia de Tucumán*, 661-667. The Radical Party nominated Eúdoro Aráoz as its candidate for Governor.
provincial legislature. The full entrance into local political and institutional life happened with the arrival of the second generation of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants.

As the Syrian-Lebanese colony began to garner political strength and its members won elected office, the community concurrently fragmented, as a variety of nationalist and religious allegiances competed for the attention of these immigrants. The flagship social institution for the colony, the Syrian-Lebanese Society, transformed itself briefly into a mutual aid society, as newer members demanded more rights and founding members drifted to other institutions or formed new ones. Other organizations, such as the Pan-Islamic Association and the Lebanese Patriotic Society, allowed for assembly based on religious or political ties. The arrival of Antun Saadeh (Anṭūn Saʿāda) in 1939 and his efforts to organize a nationalist party based on a shared Syrian identity injected new energy and an alternate form of identification with the old country. The project of Saadeh mobilized the politically committed, mostly first-generation immigrants, in Argentina, but also created interesting links with nationalists in other parts of Latin America, such as Mexico and Chile. Yet, the results of Antun Saadeh’s efforts to grow his Syrian Socialist National Party and mobilize nationalist sentiment in the Argentine mahjar achieved only mixed success, given the commitment of Lebanese nationalists in Argentina to draw distinctions between them and Syrians. Perhaps most importantly, as the second generation of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants began to reach adulthood, their relationship to their ancestral home changed as many of these people viewed themselves as Argentines first whose emphasis was on life in Argentina and not on the destiny of their parents’ homeland.
Personal Insecurity in a Turbulent Decade

Many Syrian-Lebanese immigrants experienced personal insecurity due to persistent economic distress and social unrest. The struggling sugar industry continued to produce disturbances in the rural areas, and an active organized labor sector initiated a series of strikes and protests during the period. In comparison with other areas of Argentina, Tucumán was the second most likely province to experience labor unrest.5

The collapse of the provincial economy in the earlier part of the decade forced many Arabic-speaking merchants into bankruptcy. The increased number of desperate individuals account for the overrepresentation of Syrian-Lebanese among those arrested for aggravated assault and disorderly conduct. Yet, the economic practice of peddling and the surge of Syrians and Lebanese who worked as day laborers are more likely the causes for the continued high rates of arrest and prosecution for aggravated assault. As the disorder in the countryside persisted, many itinerant merchants and job-seeking immigrants were vulnerable to physical confrontations. Syrian-Lebanese immigrants were four times more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for aggravated assault than

5 This claim is based upon data provided in Roberto P. Korzeniewicz, “Labor Unrest in Argentina, 1930-1945,” Latin American Research Review, 28, no. 1 (1993): 7-40. He notes that between 1930 and 1945 there were 78 “instances of labor unrest” in Tucumán, representing five percent of the total incidences across the country. In comparison, there were 331 and 453 instances in the capital city of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe province. Yet considering the portion of the national population in Tucumán amounted to just under four percent, the probability of labor unrest in Tucumán was slightly greater than the capital. For detailed information regarding organized labor in Tucumán, consult M. Fernández de Ullivarri, “Entre la negociación y la huelga. Sectores obreros y Estado en Tucumán, 1936-1943” (Tesis de Licenciatura, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 2003); Norma E. Ben Altabef and Alejandra I. Landaburu, “Las Trabajadoras a Domicilio: la huelga de las costureras en Tucumán, 1936,” Espacios de Genero, Volume II (Rosario, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de Rosario, 1995), 237-248.
Spanish or Italian immigrants. The general insecurity felt particularly by Syrians and Lebanese may be one reason why the Syrian-Lebanese Society transformed into a mutual aid society, and Lebanese immigrants established a mutual aid association in 1937. In addition, the Syrian-Lebanese colony seemingly suffered from continued interest by the local police force, as its members were more than three times as likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct. If arrests for disorderly conduct reflect local views and values, then this would explain why this immigrant colony still endured certain prejudices held by many in Tucumán and suffered the close interest of the police forces.

Return to Prosperity

The 1920s proved to be exceptionally difficult for the Syrian-Lebanese merchant class in Tucumán as it dropped from the wealthiest national group in 1922 to the fourth wealthiest in 1931. Much of this decline came from a fall in the value of real estate. There was also a twenty percent decline in the number of Syrian and Lebanese merchants operating in the province between 1929 and 1931. In spite of the failure of many of the colony’s businesses, terms of merchandise on a per merchant basis, Syrian-Lebanese merchants were the wealthiest in 1931 in terms of merchandise on a per merchant basis. The Great Depression also presented an opportunity for Arabic-speaking merchants. By 1935, the Syrian-Lebanese merchant class had returned to being the second-wealthiest group, and its number of merchants increased by forty percent. Moreover, the total wealth of this immigrant merchant colony increased by more than one-quarter whereas the other national merchant groups declined. The Great Depression, in contrast, decimated the Italian merchant group in Tucumán, whose size shrank by half and wealth
plummeted seventy percent; a decline the Italian community never recovered from. While the majority of the Syrian-Lebanese merchants’ wealth was located in the provincial capital, their compatriots dominated in the province’s interior markets. From the 1930s, the sophistication and complexity of the commercial adventures increased, both in terms of type of commercial activity and capital invested and rights of the firm’s principals.


The general increase in prosperity among the Syrian-Lebanese merchants did not necessarily translate into a general solidarity among this group. Beginning in the early
1930s, the number of commercial suits filed by Syrian-Lebanese merchants in provincial courts increased noticeably, and the majority of defendants were compatriots. This phenomenon resulted in combination from the increased sophistication of the commercial ventures as well as the economic uncertainty afflicting the province for most of the 1930s. More importantly, the fragmentation of the community that happened in the first half of the decade made it less attractive to pursue alternative forms of dispute resolution for internal disputes among immigrants. The Syrian-Lebanese Society, which had always presented itself as the face of the immigrant community to Tucumán society at large, continued to struggle to maintain, let alone build, its member base. The Society had additional problems as it defended itself against accusations of fraud by members of the immigrant community and its failure to pay taxes in 1935.

Greed and economic collapse inspired a range of strategies by Syrian-Lebanese merchants, which led to vicious court battles featuring leading members of the colony. Calim Amdor embezzled 80,000 pesos from his employers, the large wholesale firm Saad Hermanos, owned and operated by brothers Selim and Fortuna. Amdor had risen to become the firm’s accountant in 1928 and allegedly began to steal money almost

6 This assertion is based on a sampling from the entry books of the 3rd Secretary (Secretario) of the Court of Common Pleas (Primera Instancia) in San Miguel de Tucumán. At the time, there were four judges based in this court, each of whom had two secretaries. There were 237 entries registered between 1915 and 1942 featuring a Syrian-Lebanese plaintiff, defendant or both. More than half of these filings were entered between 1930 and 1939, and a full thirty-one percent (seventy-four) were registered between 1936 and 1942. AGPT, Primera Instancia en lo Civil y Comercial, 3ra Secretaría, Libro de Entradas.

7 For the suit regarding the failure to pay taxes, please see AGPT, Serie E, Caja 1335, Expediente 9, February 5, 1936.
immediately. For an employee who earned a monthly salary of 350 pesos, he purchased a car a few months after his promotion and later employed a chauffeur. In addition, Amdor built a home, valued at 40,000 pesos, and opened a general store, partnering with Eduardo Rodríguez, Amdor’s predecessor at Saad Brothers. Calim Amdor, described as living the “life of a pacha,” aroused the suspicions of Selim and Fortuna Saad. In early October 1930, the Saads accused their accountant of embezzlement and sought a preventive seizure (embargo preventivo) of Amdor’s assets, which the court granted. In addition, Calim Amdor filed for a meeting of creditors of his general store, only to find that Terán and Company had seized his automobile through the same legal process. Amdor was seemingly prepared for the discovery of his criminal actions as he placed the majority of his assets in his uncle’s name. After several years, Calim Amdor received legal recognition of his current impoverished state and petitioned the judge to lift the preventive seizure placed on two bank accounts, worth ten pesos, by Selim and Fortuna Saad. The brothers, who promised the court to release their claim against seized assets,

8 “Kalim Handor, Ex Contador de la casa Saad Hermanos defraudó a esta en ochenta mil pesos,” *El Orden*, October 31, 1930.


11 It is unclear if Amdor spent the intervening years in prison or not. In his petition to the judge he said that the original complaint by the Saads was “plagued with falsities” and every charge was defeated on appeal. By provincial law, criminal court proceedings are burned after a certain period of time and I have not been able to locate
seemed to have dragged their feet and continued to punish Amdor for several months after his petition.\textsuperscript{12}

The commercial suit between Domingo Kairuz and Chaker Farah Apás, two merchant giants of the Syrian-Lebanese colony, best exemplified the potentially contentious relationships among compatriot merchants. Domingo Kairuz, who was based in Buenos Aires, had deep roots in the colony in Tucumán and had been active in commercial life there since the end of the nineteenth century, including the opening of a branch office in San Miguel in 1906. In addition, his daughter, a local merchant, opened her own store in 1912. Kairuz possessed tremendous power within the Syrian-Lebanese colonies throughout Argentina, serving as the first president of the Club Libanés de Buenos Aires that was founded in October 1936. He also had great wealth. In 1929, he purchased the estancia of Argentine dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas, located in Matanzas, Buenos Aires province. Kairuz also had access to the highest strata of Argentine political life. At the groundbreaking of the Syrian-Lebanese Hospital in Buenos Aires in March 1937, Kairuz acted as one the sponsors (padrinos) along with Argentine President Augustín P. Justo, the wife of the Interior Minister, and Mercedes Marino de Ketlún, wife

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\textsuperscript{12} AGPT, Caja 1703, Expediente 8, Serie E, “Calim Amdor al Juez,” October 9, 1939.
of the prominent Syrian-Lebanese merchant Ragueb Ketlún, an Orthodox Christian from Homs.13

Chaker Farah Apás also achieved financial success and was well respected in Tucumán. He arrived in northwestern Argentina in 1902 and initially worked as an itinerant peddler. By 1920, Apás had established a wholesale business in textiles and ultimately built one of the most luxurious buildings in all of Tucumán in the heart of the Syrian-Lebanese commercial district in San Miguel. In testament to his prominence within the local Syrian-Lebanese colony, Apás was a founding member of the Syrian-Lebanese Society, a socio propietario (an initial investor of the Society given additional voting rights and prerogatives), and served as a member (vocal) on its first Board of Directors. Yet, Apás must have suffered during the difficult economic times of the 1930s, and as a result, he contacted Domingo Kairuz to arrange a loan.

Domingo Kairuz sued Chaker Farah Apás in October 1936 for defaulting on a loan of 125,000 pesos in April 1935. The loan, which carried a six percent interest rate, stipulated that interest had to be paid during the first ten days of each quarter, and if there was no payment, the entirety of the loan plus interest accrued came due. After five consecutive quarters of nonpayment, Kairuz demanded enforcement of the stipulation. In addition, Kairuz demanded that the court seize Apás’ building that was used as collateral

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and schedule it for public auction. The defendant asked for an extension, which was denied, and Domingo Kairuz ultimately purchased the building for the value of the loan. The court ordered the Apás family to vacate the premises.

The economic turmoil of the 1930s touched all sectors of the Syrian-Lebanese community and provoked certain actions and subsequent consequences. The economic elite of the colony was not immune to the decade’s distress and acted with great force to protect their interests. The loan agreement of Apás and Kairuz is fascinating because they represented the most financially successful of the colony. The financial arrangement confirms the enduring networks that immigrants could tap in times of particular need, in this case for a substantial amount of money. Immigrants utilized these networks to secure housing, financial support, and goods on consignment. The loan also reflected a tight credit market in Tucumán and the lack of institutions and resources available to merchants, farmers and industrialists in the mid-1930s. Finally, the agreement also demonstrated the limitations of these networks and how these interpersonal associations could actually lead to the financial ruin of immigrants. Chaker Farah Apás could neither pay his debt obligation nor renegotiate terms with his compatriot Domingo Kairuz. Any


attempt at extrajudicial dispute resolution mediated by members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony failed.\textsuperscript{16}

**Electoral Success in Local Politics**

In spite of the contentious relationships among some of the Syrian-Lebanese merchant class and the insecurity many from the colony experienced, this group solidified its position as the premier immigrant merchant group, and competed with Argentine merchants for wealthiest group, during the second half of the 1930s. Syrian and Lebanese traders made up the wealthiest merchant group in six of the ten jurisdictions outside the capital in 1937, including four of the six sugar cane districts.\textsuperscript{17} This return to economic prosperity and predominance in the province set the stage for the rise of certain members from the Syrian-Lebanese community to contend successfully in elections for the provincial legislature and national congress. The general return to prosperity of the Syrian-Lebanese merchant class and the period of broad political stability beginning in 1935 created an environment for members of this immigrant group to achieve prominence in party politics and electoral success. As a result, victory in local politics by members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony was a signature feature of the late 1930s and beyond. What paved the way for this achievement in electoral politics was the commercial success of many first generation immigrants. The increasing integration of the Syrian-Lebanese community into local socio-cultural life also played an important

\textsuperscript{16} See, for instance, APJ, Contratos mercantiles, Registro Público de Comercio, Turbay Hnos, Disolución social, June 8, 1911, Volume 9, 224.

\textsuperscript{17} Anuario de Estadística correspondiente al año 1937, 115-149. Syrian-Lebanese merchants were the wealthiest in the districts of Famaillá, Río Chico, Leales, Cruz Alta, Burruyacú, and Trancas.
role for future political operatives, as did the prominence of the Syrian-Lebanese Society. The efforts of Alcira Malouf de Saad and her colleagues in performing charity on behalf of the poor and public institutions fostered a public perception of Syrian-Lebanese benevolence. Men from the colony who ran for public office benefited from this general opinion.

The initial generation of politically successful immigrants came from the interior of the province and not from its capital. For instance, Wadi Dip, a Christian, became the first Syrian-Lebanese person elected to the provincial legislature, winning a seat in 1937 as a Radical. He had family members in the town of Monteros as early as 1910, likely his father and uncle, and later set up a business, named Wadi Dip and Company, in partnership with an Argentine named Santiago Ribet in May 1924. The venture allowed the men to act as wholesale merchants, operate the Dip family bakery, and work as commission and consignment agents. Although the merchant contract showed that Wadi Dip (20,000 pesos) invested more capital than Ribet (12,500 pesos), the partners were to split the profits and losses evenly and receive the same monthly salary for personal expenses. His commercial success helped him gain prominence in the provincial Syrian-Lebanese colony, and as a result he was a founding member of the Syrian-Lebanese Society.

In the period before his election to the provincial legislature, Dip was the president of the Radical Party’s Monteros Departmental Committee and a member of various provincial Radical organizations. By the time he was elected in 1937, Dip had expanded his business into the neighboring district of Leales, dropped Ribet from the
company, and added Federico Guillermo Sortheix, a relative of the former Radical governor José G. Sortheix, as a silent investor. This economic success allowed him to enter the party politics of Monteros and the subsequent years witnessed his rise in local politics, emerging as a political boss, which led to his election as mayor of Monteros and, subsequently, his seat in provincial congress.

Jorge Fiad, a Christian, also used the economic success of his commercial and agricultural ventures to cultivate political capital in the province’s interior. Fiad, the same person who benefited from state intervention during an illness in 1902, owned a general store in Bella Vista, Famaillá department with his brothers Nicolas and Gabriel. The three bought some farmland in Palá-Palá, Leales department, in 1912 and began to cultivate sugar cane and corn. In 1917, they, along with a fourth brother Esperidon, established a general store in Quilmes, the area around the train stop at Palá-Palá. The store in Quilmes was such a success that the Fiad brothers moved their headquarters from Bella Vista. This venture became the most important general store and grocery in Leales department. As the Fiad commercial empire grew, they established additional stores in Laguna Blanca and Sueldos, also in Leales department, and paid for the construction of a public school in Palá-Palá named “Escuela nacional ‘República del Líbano,’” (“Republic of Lebanon” National School). Jorge Fiad was able to translate this success and increased prominence in local society into elective office, winning a seat to the provincial legislature by 1946.

While the success of Wadi Dip and Jorge Fiad took place in departments located in the sugar growing zone of Tucumán, the rise of Antonio Fajre and Antonio Moreno
took place in the least populated provincial department of Trancas. Antonio Fajre established a commercial venture with his brother Miguel in the small town of Tapia, 25 kilometers north of San Miguel de Tucumán, in early 1933. The Fajre brothers operated a wholesale and retail general store, a meat market (abasto de carne), and sold local fruit and its derivatives like jam; an operation in which the brothers invested 15,000 pesos.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1936, Antonio bought out his brother and continued his merchant activities in Trancas, forming part of the wealthiest national merchant group in the department. This prosperity gave Fajre social capital and a clientele that he parlayed into success in electoral politics, winning election to the provincial legislature in 1946.

Antonio Moreno, a Lebanese immigrant who took a Hispanicized name upon arrival to Argentina, used his prominence as a local farmer more so than his position as a merchant in Trancas to achieve positions in the provincial government and success at the polls. The local cultivators’ respect for Moreno led to his emergence as a spokesman for this interest group, which was much smaller and weaker than the sugar farmers in the southeastern part of Tucumán. In 1940, the provincial government designated Moreno, along with an Argentine, to represent the farmers of Trancas in a meeting with Argentine President Roberto M. Ortiz. The concern of the farmers centered on a guaranteed market for their produce, primarily garbanzo beans and grains. In the meeting with Ortiz, Moreno gave an extensive review of the commercial agriculture enterprises in the department and asked for official protection. His efforts received favorable press from the journalists in Buenos Aires, earned the support of the provincial legislature, and won

\textsuperscript{18} APJ, Contratos de mercantiles, Fajre Hermanos, inscripción de contrato, October 6, 1933, Volume 33, pp. 62-65.
a huge victory for his peers. President Ortiz arranged for the shipping and selling of the produce from Trancas to the city markets of Santa Fe, Rosario and Buenos Aires at “reasonable prices.” This triumph confirmed Moreno’s entrance into the local Radical Party apparatus where he became a political boss, later served as the president of the provincial Commission on Hygiene and Development, and ultimately won election to the national congress.

While political success for Arabic-speaking immigrants in the interior became a pattern in the 1930s, Jorge Schehdán achieved prominence before the emergence of the Syrian-Lebanese colony as a political force. A Christian immigrant from Batroun, Mount Lebanon, Schehdán arrived in Tucumán in 1907, where he assumed a place among the cultural elite of his immigrant community, in particular working with Nagib Baaclini. Schehdán achieved his success in the political circles of San Miguel de Tucumán, where he did not work as a merchant like his peers in the interior. Instead, he represented firms in Tucumán and the Northwest, such as the international Sun Insurance Company and the provincial San Pablo Sugar Company, achieving a seat on Tucumán’s commercial bourse by 1926. He entered into local politics by allying with the Nougués brothers. He joined

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19 Saleh de Canuto and Budeguer, *El aporte de los sirios y libaneses a Tucumán*, 65, 72-73.

the movement, known as the “Defensa Provincial Bandera Blanca,” when Juan Luis Nougués ran for and won election to the mayoralty of San Miguel de Tucumán in 1927. Schehdán was elected in 1931 as an elector on behalf of Defensa Provincial for the federal elections for President and Vice President. With Nougués’ ascension to the governorship that year, he was appointed Director of the provincial Department of Labor. Despite the fall of Nougués in 1934, Schehdán continued in public life, winning a seat on the city council by 1943 and ultimately serving as its Vice President.²¹

While Wadi Dip, Jorge Fiad, Antonio Fajre, Antonio Moreno, and Jorge Schehdan were all first generation immigrants residing in Argentina who achieved success in local political life, it was the second generation from the Syrian-Lebanese colony that entered local and national political life en masse. Dr. Alfredo David Maxud proved to be one of the first and most successful second-generation immigrants to participate in political life. Maxud grew up in the hamlet of Los Pereyra in the Cruz Alta department, an important sugar-farming zone just east of the provincial capital, where his father and uncle owned a general store. He graduated with a law degree from the University of La Plata in 1942, and, after returning to Tucumán, he passed the bar exam that May. Five years later, Maxud formed part of the original faculty of the College of Economic Sciences, teaching civil law in the Accounting program. Later in his career, Maxud acted as the Interim Dean (Decano Normalizador) of the College from June 1973

²¹ See “Jorge Schehdán,” Ṣada al-Sharg, December 4, 1926; Anuario de Estadística de la provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año 1931 (Tucumán: Imprenta M. Violetto & Cía, 1933), 473; Saleh de Canuto, El aporte de los sirios y libaneses a Tucumán, 74-75; Ponsati, Aportes para una reseña de la colectividad árabe Tucumána, 18; Abu Saʿd, Muʿjam Asmāʾ al-Usar wa-l-Ashkhās, 500.
to October 1974. Whether or not Maxud participated in local Radical Party politics prior to 1946 is unclear, his ascension thereafter was spectacular. In the wake of the decisive election of Perón to the Presidency, Maxud became a rising star in the local political milieu. He was appointed Tucumán’s Secretary of the Treasury, Public Works and Industry under Peronist Governor Carlos Domínguez, and, by the end of the decade, he won election and served as the delegate representing Tucumán at the national Constitutional Convention of 1949.  

Maxud was far from unique as other second generation Syrian-Lebanese were very active at all levels of politics. Ernesto Baaclini, son of Nagib and a Peronist, was the Deputy Director (Secretario, 2º Jefe) of the provincial Directorate of Statistics in 1946 and served on the municipal council of San Miguel de Tucumán. José Benito Fajre, admitted to the bar in Tucumán in 1935, was elected to national congress as a Radical in 1946, becoming one of the opposition members, known as the Block of 44, to the

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The diversity of political party identification and pursuits among the second generation is an interesting and important distinction from their fathers, suggesting greater absorption into the broader Argentine community. Antonio Bichara and Pedro Estofan had advocated as early as 1930 for the organization of the colony as a Radical political block to ensure the political elites represented their interests. Indeed, the vast majority of first generation Syrian-Lebanese identified with the Radical Party, and the initial wave of first generation immigrant politicians, save Jorge Schehdán, made their way through local Radical Party apparatuses. The second generation, however, was decidedly more diverse in their political identification and pursuits.

**Institutional Diversity and Community Fragmentation**

Arabic-speaking immigrants established new social institutions during the 1930s as the flagship Syrian-Lebanese Society lost two-thirds of its membership. In a blistering attack, Antonio Bichara accused the Syrian-Lebanese Society’s directors of operating a dictatorship that benefited the wholesalers (*mayoristas*) who comprised the leadership, at the expense of the small-scale merchants – the association’s rank and file. The editor declared that the association was not a mutual aid society, but rather an “amorphous

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“conglomerate” of large-scale merchants designed to position themselves as representatives of the colony. In the first two years of the Syrian-Lebanese Society’s existence, it had nearly 600 members, but subsequently declined to less than 200 by 1931. According to Bichara, middling and lower class elements of the Syrian-Lebanese colony had little incentive to join the organization because the board of directors had created a stock system so that members could buy shares of the association and hold the status of proprietary member (socio proprietario). Moreover, these members possessed as many votes as shares owned and a statutory right to sit on the board of directors.27

This attack on the society’s leadership came in response to a complaint lodged by former board member Elias Fiad, who was also a founding member of the organization. Fiad argued that the approved proposal by the board to contract a loan of 20,000 pesos to renovate the social hall should be nullified because the meeting did not have a quorum. The protest swelled and a group of members drafted a letter to the provincial attorney general asking for his intervention.28 The protests seemingly worked, as more than a year later members of the colony still demanded the refurbishment of the social hall.29

Antonio Bichara proposed three critical reforms to democratize and advance the role of the Syrian-Lebanese Society: transform it into a benevolent aid society, reform the

27 Ibid.


statutes to eliminate the proprietary member category, and remove the sitting board of directors.\textsuperscript{30}

The turmoil within the Syrian-Lebanese Society likely prompted the establishment of additional community institutions. These new associations marked the diversity of the Arabic-speaking community, but also served as a source of internal fragmentation for a colony estimated at 10,000 to 20,000 immigrants, not including their children born with Argentine citizenship.\textsuperscript{31} While the Maronite Catholics and Orthodox Christians had created their institutions before and just after World War I, the Muslim community in Tucumán organized itself around the Pan-Islamic Association in 1929. Yet even the Muslim community further fragmented as the immigrants established the ʿAlawite Society of Mutual Aid in 1930. While new associations based on religious identities appeared, politics of the homeland and socioeconomic class still defined the most important divisions within the Syrian-Lebanese colony.

On September 10, 1933, the Muslim community of the Syrian-Lebanese colony celebrated the completion of the Pan-Islamic Association’s social hall with members from the highest levels of the provincial and municipal governments. Governor Juan Luis Nougués, provincial Interior Minister José Luis Torres, the President of the

\textsuperscript{30}“Dictadura en la Sociedad Sirio Libanesa de Tucumán,” \textit{al-Hurriyya}, February 3, 1931.

Municipal Council, a representative from the mayor’s office, and a delegation from the Syrian-Lebanese Society attended the luncheon.32 The Governor thanked the Muslim community for its cooperation and support given to the government and noted that the Syrian-Lebanese colony in general completely respected the laws and authorities of the province.33 Several other speakers composed poems, and one lectured on the glories of the Islamic past. Miguel A. Yapur, speaking on behalf of the Syrian-Lebanese Society, referred to the pressing need for the union of all sectors of the Arabic-speaking community in order to make this immigrant group one of the most respected in the province.34 The directors of the Syrian-Lebanese Society were not the only ones concerned about the community’s fragmentation. The institutional diversity, particularly the emergence of Pan-Islamic Association and the ‘Alawite Society, dismayed one observer from the colony. The author, who chose the penname “Street Crossing,” pondered why one immigrant group would build three discreet social institutions. In the writer’s view it was unnecessary to create additional associations that served a subset of the colony and only inhibited the immigrant group’s supposed unity.35

The religious institutions of the Syrian-Lebanese colony were the least provocative of the new organizations emerging in the 1930s. The Centro Libanés, or Lebanese Center, was designed specifically as a political association catering to

34 “Se efectuó la inauguración del local social de la Asociación Pan-Islámico el día 10,” al-Mahjar, September 30, 1933.
immigrants from Lebanon and the shifting identification with the Lebanese nation. The controversy surrounding this group spread throughout the Argentine mahjar. In explaining the reason for establishing this institution, the members of the Lebanese Center rejected the notions Syrians and Lebanese were united by “indissoluble bonds” as a “false conventionality.” Furthermore, the founders proclaimed “the children of two distinct states [Syria and Lebanon] could never work jointly in good of the interests of their homeland.”

This organization, however, was ephemeral, and the ultimate fragmentation happened later in the decade.

Principal figures of the Syrian-Lebanese community established the Lebanese Patriotic Society (Sociedad Patriótica Libanesa), on August 22, 1937 as a branch of the main association in Buenos Aires. The organization’s leadership included prominent merchants, such as Guetas Chebaia, Miguel Yapur, and Fortunato Saad, and public intellectuals Nagib Baaclini and Pedro Nacif Estofan. Yapur, Baaclini, and Estofan were founding members of the Syrian-Lebanese Society, and all had served on the board of directors. This new institution, however, was distinctly political in orientation and designed to promote and serve a particular population. As a result, the Society’s initial project divided the province into four zones and tasked prominent Lebanese immigrants to conduct a census of their compatriots and their children (Padrón General de Asociados). Once this information was collected and organized, the association agreed to

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launch an aggressive information campaign to build membership.\textsuperscript{38} The participation of these leading immigrants, such as Chebaia, Yapur, Baaclini and Estofán, came at the expense of the Syrian-Lebanese Society, from which these men dissociated themselves. This fragmentation of the immigrant community was also apparent in some artistic works by the colony’s intellectuals. For instance, Pedro Estofán, who had participated in Arab nationalist politics in the 1920s and was instrumental in the foundation of the Lebanese Patriotic Society, became a recognized poet in Argentine cultural circles. In his 1942 poetry collection, entitled \textit{Alma}, Estofán reduced his heritage to little more than a cultural identity. At the same time, Tucumán took center stage as the point of reference. The poem \textit{Los años míos} (\textit{My Years}) is illustrative:

\begin{quote}
In Tucumán, my years were born,
Near the springs, near the ferns;
For this my soul carries the murmur of rivers
And there is the flutter of pigeons in my chest

The woman from Catamarca was my stork [who delivered me]:
She gave me in the cradle a lot of fruit of the vine
How does one then not love Poetry
That weaves in its eyes the moon

The recall of Lebanon emboldens me
For its eternal fire circulates in my veins
Without pretension to the scepter, or the crown
I consider myself brother of the Nazarene\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{39} P. Nacif Estofán, \textit{Alma (Poesías)} (San Miguel de Tucumán: Talleres Gráficos de \textit{El Eco de Oriente}, 1942), 73.
In this poem, Tucumán, where Estofán was born, was primary, featuring descriptions of the province’s geography and allusions to its wildlife. References to places in the province and even streets in the capital are predominant throughout his later oeuvre. Lebanon, where he grew up and was educated, became a font of cultural heritage. Unlike the 1920s, when the destiny of his homeland figured prominently in his work, Lebanon’s political reality and national composition seemed to recede in importance. This shift in the place of the homeland in Estofán’s worldview was indicative of a general shift for many of the first generation immigrants. To be sure, there were many who were politically committed; however, this fervor from the 1920s and 1930s began to abate. A crucial example was the transformation of the Lebanese Patriotic Society into the Lebanese Association of Mutual Aid (Asociación Libanesa de Socorros Mutuos), in which political content was stripped and emphasis was given to cultural identity. Hence, the fragmentation of the Syrian-Lebanese colony was complete by the time Antun Saadeh arrived in northwestern Argentina.

Antun Saadeh, Syrian Nationalism, and the Tucumán mahjar

While there was a growing emphasis on life in Argentina, the politics of the old country did play an important role for many immigrants and their children. As the Syrian-Lebanese colony matured, a number of social institutions based on confessional and novel national identities emerged and fragmented the community. There was, however, a brief moment of intense cultural and political activity and excitement around the Syrian nationalist movement led by Antun Saadeh. Born in 1904 and raised in the village of Shuwayr, Chouf district, Mount Lebanon, his father Khalil was a famous
physician, intellectual and political activist who worked and published journals in Argentina, to which he emigrated in 1913, and after 1919 in Brazil. Antun arrived in Brazil in 1920, joining his father and helping edit and write for the elder Saadeh’s review *al-Majalla (The Magazine)*. In São Paulo, Antun was active in masonic lodges and attempted to establish a variety of nationalist parties among the Arabic-speaking colonies in Brazil. Largely unsatisfied with his place in São Paulo, Antun returned to Lebanon in 1930. Two years later he established the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) to pursue complete independence from French colonial rule. The Mandate administrators eventually discovered Saadeh and his party, incarcerating him on several occasions. In 1939, Antun Saadeh departed Lebanon for Latin America, initially traveling to Brazil and then Argentina, where he and his family remained until 1947.40

Saadeh arrived in Tucumán in 1939 at the invitation of Yubran Massuh, Víctor’s father, and to a hero’s welcome. The colony’s wealthiest merchants and youth leaders met him at the train station, and later held a huge party in his honor at the home of Camel Auad, a prominent wholesaler. At this event, local members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony organized a political party committed to the independence of Syria.41 Antun Saadeh advocated a Syrian nationalism, arguing that Syrians were distinct group of people based on geography and shared history. For this movement, the past and future


Syria included contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, historical Palestine, the Sinai Peninsula, and the island of Cyprus. These lands possessed natural borders and an assortment of people that over time formed one nation. As a result, Saadeh and his disciples eschewed Arab nationalism, asserting it was “a surrender of Syria’s uniqueness, and an acceptance by its gifted people of an inferior status.” This emphasis on a Syrian national identity attracted many “among the educated urban population” in Syria and Lebanon.  

As Saadeh settled into his new environs, the elder Massuh escorted and introduced Antun Saadeh to the various Syrian-Lebanese colonies, and soon the two established a periodical, *al-Zawbaʿa* (*The Cyclone*) with Massuh as editor and chief propagandist. The two men went into business together in June 1944, opening a wholesale book and stationery store. It was in Tucumán that Antun Saadeh set out to mobilize the Syrian-Lebanese colonies and create branches of the SSNP across Latin America. Indeed, Saadeh initially encountered strong support from a broad cross-section of these communities in the Americas. Active groups emerged in Mexico and Chile who published in *al-Zawbaʿa* and produced their own local publications. In Tucumán, Saadeh’s arrival inspired intense action at the cultural level as immigrants formed theatrical troupes, organized meetings, and produced plays and poetry about the homeland. Yet, this early surge in support encountered some resistance from many

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43 APJPT, Contratos Mercantiles, Registro Público de Comercio, Contrato Social, Saadeh y Massuh, August 3, 1944, Volume 47, 90-94.
established immigrants who were angling for an independent Lebanon and stoked controversy over who spoke for the community. As the decade proceeded, interest in Saadeh and his movement stalled in the colony in Tucumán. Yubran Massuh, easily Saadeh’s biggest intellectual supporter in Argentina left al-Zawba’a, which was published less frequently over the course of the 1940s as criticism of Saadeh and his perceived affinity for fascism increased.

One of the earliest consequences of Antun Saadeh’s arrival in Tucumán was a distinctly Syrian nationalist form of cultural outpouring. Yubran Massuh, the editor of al-Zawba’a and a long time publisher of Arabic-language periodicals in Argentina, wrote a play performed in theaters in Tucumán and Santiago del Estero. The play, entitled *Mother and Not Mother (Umm wa Ghayr Umm)* was didactic in intent and alternated between a comedy and sociopolitical critique in which the “events took place between the homeland [Syria] and the mahjar.”

In addition, this surge in artistic and intellectual activity spurred the formation of the Syrian Cultural Ensemble (al-Firqa al-Sūriyya al-Thaqāfiyya). This group, which was composed of self-styled Syrian nationalists (qawmiyyūn), crafted plays designed to engage serious issues while critiquing Syrian customs and cultural expressions. Its initial theatrical presentation offered three acts. The first piece was entitled “Brisk Trade” (“Nifāq al-Jumla”), and poked fun at the prominence of Syrian commercial power in Tucumán and the colony’s leading merchants. The second act, entitled “Holder of a Bachelor of Science Degree” (“Ḥāmil Bakalūriyūs ‘Ulūm”), had two parts: a musical movement, followed by an “electrifying”

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44 “Riwāyat Jubrān Massūh al-Tamthiliyya,” *al-Zawba’a*, June 1, 1941.
nationalist speech from Pedro Llamil (Jamīl) Neme, the Secretary of the Syrian-Lebanese Society. The final act was a one-man play by Gabriel Candalaft, president of the Ensemble, entitled “Sniffing Cocaine” (“Sham al-Kūkāyīn”). The event was a rousing success, provoking the Tucumán daily La Gaceta to report, “the applause for [the event] was beyond imagination.”

Neme’s speech roused the crowd to near delirium as he proclaimed:

“Verily the Syrian nationalist rebirth (al-nahḍa al-sūriyya al-qawmiyya) is rising on culture. And I call upon every youth [with] Syrian blood circulating in his veins to join forces with [his fellows] because it is the one step that positions a great people from Syria to reclaim its place among nations.”

For Saadeh and his adherents, a Syrian identity surmounted all other identities, and divisions along confessional lines were viewed as an impediment to the nationalist project. Others within the Syrian-Lebanese colony also viewed the tragedy of religious divisions and its impact on the community. The Maronite Archbishop Mubarak in Argentina, for instance, called on Muslims and Christians in August 1941 to agree to be united like a “compact edifice” in this critical historical moment, as the Allied forces launched its invasion of Vichy-controlled Syria and Lebanon in June. While Mubarak’s speech reminded al-Zawba’a’s editors of a speech by the nationalist Kamal al-Qassab in

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45 “al-Firqa al-Sūriyya al-Thaqāfa,” al-Zawba’a, July 1, 1941. The quotation from La Gaceta was quoted in the article in al-Zawba’a.

46 “al-Firqa al-Sūriyya al-Thaqāfa,” al-Zawba’a, July 1, 1941.

Syria, they found it strange the Arabic-language press in Argentina that published Mubarak’s address rejoiced at it, as if the unity of the Syrian-Lebanese colony were real.48 The editors argued that if men of religion like al-Qassab and Mubarak truly intended to engage the issues – political, national and nationalist – affecting the country and were concerned with its success and progress, they would publish their views widely and “lay the foundation” on behalf of the country.49

The divisions within the Syrian-Lebanese colonies in Argentina and disputes that emerged among leading intellectuals proved to be major obstacles to goal of unity under the flag of the SSNP. Unity based on a Syrian national identity was controversial, producing supporters and critics throughout the Levant and in the mahjar. In addition to enthusiasts in Argentina, a strong SSNP branch party in Mexico published a periodical in Spanish, and became a regular contributor to al-Zawba’a from Santiago, Chile.50

48 Kamal al-Qassab came from a distinguished Damascene family who played an important role in Faisal’s fleeting Kingdom of Greater Syria (March-July 1920). Al-Qassab went to Haifa in exile during the early years of the French Mandate and ran the Islamic school there, which became an important center of the Salafi Islamic modernist movement and nationalists of various stripes. See Abdullah Schleifer, “Izz al-Din al-Qassam: Preacher and Mujahid,” Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East, Edmund Burke III, Editor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 170.


50 Aniceto Shain, a second-generation immigrant in Santiago, Chile, wrote his essays in Spanish. A common thread among the second generation in Tucumán was a loss of their parents’ maternal tongue. For instance, Víctor Massuh contributed one essay to al-Zawba’a, written in Spanish. Víctor lamented to me that he regretted his parents’ decision not to teach the Arabic language to him, his siblings and extended family. This disconnect to discussions concerning Syria and Lebanon that took place among immigrants and in the Arabic-language press is a powerful reason why the second generation tended to focus on their lives in Argentina. Víctor Massuh, in conversation with the author, September 2007.
Syrian nationalist cause also featured a dispersed set of financial supporters. For instance, Syrian-Lebanese merchants located on the island of Fernando Pó, Spanish Guinea, raised 11,000 Spanish pesetas (200 British pounds sterling) and arranged for its transfer. These transnational connections were simply a continuation of a long-held practice by Arabic-speaking immigrants in the mahjar, who used communication and transportation technologies to maintain contact, carry on debates, share news, and remit money to support revolutionary movements and assist relatives in the old country.

At the transnational level, Antun Saadeh and the SSNP faced resistance from leading intellectuals, many of whom had arrived in the Americas before World War I or shortly thereafter. For instance, Saadeh published a 36-part essay series on the poet Rashīd al-Khūrī, also known as al-Shā‘ir al-Qarawī (Village Poet) and dean of the Latin American mahjar poets. It could be described as a personal assault on a perceived competitor. Al-Khūrī immigrated to Brazil in 1913 and moved to São Paulo where he acted as the Syrian colony’s poet and worked as a merchant. He was a peer of Antun’s father Khalil and befriended the younger Saadeh upon his arrival in 1919. During the French Mandate period, al-Khūrī became a supporter of Shakīb Arslan, the leading intellectual for the Arab nationalists, and took a more public stance in the 1930s. Antun Saadeh seemingly took this decision as such a personal slight that he began the essay series disparaging al-Khūrī’s poetic prowess. After the fourth article in the series, mutual

51 “Mabarra Qawmiyya,” al-Zawba‘a, April 1, 1942. Fernando Pó is now known as the island of Bioko, where Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, is located.

52 The series ran in al-Zawba‘a from October 15, 1941 to May 1, 1942.
colleagues implored Saadeh to stop the assault. In a fit of megalomania, Saadeh responded:

“Those intermediaries are showing their compassion in the wrong place, for what is at stake is the interest of the whole nation, and every [act of] compassion used to the detriment of the people is a crime… al-Zawba’a aims to make of Rashid al-Qarawi an example for all ‘the leaders of thought’ of his class.”

The polemic reached such a peak that Ilia Abu Madi, the dean of North American mahjar poets, entered the dispute in support of Rashīd al-Khūrī. Antun Saadeh then attacked Abu Māḍī and another prominent Syrian intellectual and newspaper publisher based in New York City, Ṭabd al-Masīḥ Ḥaddād. Saadeh concluded that “the decline of national and social ties in our communities and the remoteness of our sons and daughters born in the mahjar from our language and their aversion to identifying themselves with us” resulted from the behavior of the collection of “literary impostors and mercenaries of the press.”

This assault on some of the most esteemed members of the lettered class in the mahjar and the criticism directed at the supporters and fans of these poets surely undercut

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54 Quoted in Maatouk, “Sa’adeh’s Views on Literature and Literary Renovation,” 479.

much support for Saadeh. Shortly after the series concluded, the SSNP in Mexico
published two older articles desperately showing that even the most famous Lebanese in
the mahjar supported a unified Syria. The first piece was an article written by Kahlil
Gibran, published posthumously in 1934 by the esteemed Cairene publication *al-Hilāl*, in
which he declared “I am one of those who struggled and has struggled for the unity and
independence of a Syria with clearly defined borders.” The second article came from a
September 1930 article in *The Syrian World*, published by Saloum Moukarzel, who
affirmed that “We do not approve of the general term ‘Arab,’ nor the limited term
‘Lebanese.’ And if more precision is necessary, we do not accept those who call us
Syrian-Lebanese or Syrian Palestinians, or Syrian Arabs. Syria is an independent
geographic unit and we are in our duty to recognize it as such. We have come from Syria
and only this name should we adopt.”56 The invocation of Gibran and Moukarzel seemed
to have little effect in convincing Lebanese nationalists in the mahjar to convert to
Saadeh’s Syrian nationalist cause. Over time, Saadeh’s influence in northwestern
Argentina waned. In addition, funding for *al-Zawba‘a* must have suffered either from
cancelled subscriptions or weak fundraising, or both, because by late 1944 the editors
began publishing infrequently. By the time Antun Saadeh returned to Lebanon in 1947,
he had lost the support of the community in general and even his most ardent backer,

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Yubran Massuh. The Lebanese government arrested and executed Antun Saadeh in 1949.57

**Conclusion**

The concerns of the first-generation immigrants regarding integration and acceptance by local society disappeared over the course of the 1930s. The return to economic prosperity by the Syrian-Lebanese merchant class allowed for the successful entrance into electoral politics by their compatriots, many of whom were merchants. At the same time, the tension that existed between life in Argentina and commitment to the old country disappeared as the first-generation began to emphasize their lives in their new homeland. The second generation simply had Argentina as their primary point of reference; a result of the local education system and a systematic loss of Arabic as a language of communication. As a result, this generation carried on the family business and pursued political opportunities that their parents previously did not have the opportunity to do. This general receding in importance of the old country was challenged briefly by the arrival of Antun Saadeh and his efforts to build his political movement. While there was ample support early on for the Syrian nationalist movement in Tucumán, over the course of the 1940s the energy abated, and the majority of the community concentrated on life in Argentina. For many, a politicized identity, whether Arab, Lebanese, or Syrian, evolved into a cultural identity that confirmed the fragmentation of the community that had begun during World War I.

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Chapter 7: Epilogue

In April 1932, the editor of the Buenos Aires Arabic-language weekly *al-Waṭan* (The Homeland) published a letter from the leader of the Syrian Revolutionary Forces battling the French Mandate in Syria. Sultan Pasha al-Atrash acknowledged receipt of the most recent remittance of funds, and thanked “the generous benefactor” (*al-muhsin al- karīm*) from the Arabic-speaking colonies in Argentina. He urged these people to continue giving material aid and emotional support against the “politics of colonialism” (*siyāsat al-istiʿmār*). And immigrants from what had now become the French and British mandates of Syria, Greater Lebanon and Palestine heeded this call and continued to contribute funds to the resistance.¹ The same edition contained a letter from Yusef al-ʿIssa, a Palestinian Christian based in Amman who was part of the Arab nationalist intelligentsia. Al-ʿIssa emphasized the continued struggle of the freedom fighters

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(mujāhidīn) against the French. He proudly announced various Syrian political parties had met in Egypt and had agreed to unify in common cause in support of the fighters.²

The resistance benefited from an organized transnational network that exchanged letters and moral support, collected and transferred money to pay for the fight against European colonialism, and debated the future of the homeland. Suleiman Najm al-Bikfānī was in constant communication with the leaders of the resistance, including Sultan al-Atrash and leading Arab nationalist figures in South America. In Argentina, al-Bikfānī travelled to large cities and small towns where Arabic-speaking immigrants worked and lived collecting donations for the resistance. In addition to securing funds for remittance, al-Bikfānī, who self-identified as a “volunteer freedom fighter,” also published the names of the donors and the amount they gave. An emerging political identity among these immigrant colonies based on a modern sense of Arabness, an Arab nationalism, bolstered this network.

French colonialism in Syria and the newly created Greater Lebanon had a direct impact on the Arabic-speaking immigrant colonies in Argentina. Reaction to the French mandatory power provoked alliances based upon ideological concerns, not confessional divides. As demonstrated throughout this study, one’s religious identity was not necessarily predictive of political allegiance. For instance, Arabic-speaking immigrants from colonies throughout the Americas met in Buenos Aires in early 1941 to discuss the status of the homeland. Emir Emin Arslan, a Druze, served as president of the First Pan-Arab Congress in America (al-Muʿtam al-ʿArabī al-awwal fī Amīrikā), announcing

Shakib Arslan, Emin’s cousin, as the official representative before governments and international bodies. The participants included Sunni Muslims and Christians such as the Zaki and Elias Qonsol, brothers from Nabk, Syria. The attendees agreed on and published a set of principles, the second declaring Syria consisted of “Lebanon, Palestine, and East Jordan,” and together this territory made up the Arab land (qutr ʿarabī). The subsequent principle rejected the legitimacy of the French and British Mandates and denied a Jewish National Home (al-waṭan al-qawmī al-ṣāhyūnī) in “Southern Syria (Palestine).” While the activities of Zionists and the increase of European Jewish settlers in Palestine caused concern among Arabic-speaking immigrants in the Americas, the mandate was the more divisive issue in the 1920s and 1930s. Novel political identities fused with emergent ethnic, national, and racialized identities to further intensify these divisions.

Scholars of contemporary mass migration claim the movement of people in the era of globalization is new and distinct from the old migration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These scholars argue the “multiple, circular, and return” trips

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4 In general, there are two interpretations of transnationalism, one focusing on contemporary migration and the other examining “transnational phenomena.” Scholars who focus on “transnational phenomena” emphasize how the movement of ideologies, images, and material goods, so-called “cultural flows,” supersede the historical importance of the nation-state (and, in fact, maybe hastening its decline) and create opportunities at reformulating collective and individual identities along universal ideals (human rights) and/or religious or pan-ethnic commonalities. See Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, “Why Public Culture,” Public Culture 1 (1988): 5-9; and Ulf
of present-day migration diverge from the “singular great journeys” of the old migration, where earlier migrants went through a “permanent rupture” with their homeland.\(^5\) These studies also suggest the last wave of immigration lacked a transnational sphere, while “today, immigrants develop networks, activities, patterns of living, and ideologies that span their home and the host society.”\(^6\) The development of new transportation and communication technologies provides a key reason for these claims. These scholars insist “for all their significance, early transnational economic and political enterprises were not normative or even common among the vast majority of immigrants, nor were they undergirded by the thick web of regular instantaneous communication and easy personal travel that we encounter today.”\(^7\) Studies on these “new” immigrants, or “transmigrants,” primarily examine communities situated in North America and treat transnationalism as a mixture of civic-political associations, economic transactions and

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arrangements, social networks, and cultural identities bonding immigrants and their institutions in two or more countries in diverse, complex configurations.\(^8\)

The example of Arabic-speakers in northwestern Argentina demonstrates immigrants lived in a milieu that was at once distinctly local and yet not bound by national borders. By placing this immigrant colony in both its local and global contexts, scholars may evaluate the interstices between a host of issues and processes that alter identities, relationships, goals and strategies. It also provides a framework for comparison with other immigrant groups. Yet, scholars should not dispense completely with smaller units of organization for larger ones, such as a “global cross-roads” paradigm.\(^9\) In the case of Argentina, local conditions influenced the experience of migration, which was also sensitive to macro-processes evident in a broader global setting. The study of migration should endeavor to include both.

The focus of my study centers on Arabic-speakers in Argentina “from the perspective of a constantly changing set of relationships within the immigrant collectivity and between it and the larger society.”\(^10\) People chose to associate with or quit the immigrant colony at particular moments. Leaders of the community moved to expel

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competitors or the unwanted at other moments. Immigrant intellectuals advocated a set of behavioral norms to help solidify the respectability of the leadership in the eyes of local elites. Community leaders established social institutions to consolidate a social hierarchy within the immigrant colony. At the same time, a minority of the immigrant colony comprised these social institutions while it attempted to speak on behalf of all. More Syrians and Lebanese, however, might be arrested for disorderly conduct and public intoxication than might be a member of the Syrian-Lebanese Society in any given year. Hence, the term community can be problematic when studying a heterogeneous group of people who emigrated from the same region. For some, their connection to the homeland formed the basis of self-identification, yet in many instances the homeland was simply one aspect of a person’s identity and was not necessarily more dominant than other loyalties.

This was increasingly true for the second-generation immigrants who fashioned a cultural identity within the larger Argentine national identity. Over time, membership in the Syrian-Lebanese Society in both Tucumán and Jujuy was as much about local political participation and electoral success as it was about fostering a connection with the homeland. Given that local and transnational politics had a direct impact on the composition of the community, heritage alone does not necessarily make one a member of an organized immigrant colony. As Jeff Lesser and Raanan Rein declare, more than fifty percent of the Jewish population in Brazil neither associated nor identified with Jewish institutions. These so-called ‘unaffiliated ethnics’ are usually lost in the
scholarship. This study casts as wide a net as possible to illustrate the variety of immigrant life experiences in Argentina.\textsuperscript{11}

Transnational politics played a critical role in the formation and refashioning of the Arabic-speaking colonies across the Americas. The political transformations in the homelands created union and discord, forced certain members to relocate, and provoked the formation of competing social institutions across Argentina. The destiny of the homeland became important to many immigrants, but these people fought over the meaning of that destiny. Hence, the manner of commitment varied widely and ranged from returning to fight, to publishing broadsides against colonial domination, to sending money to revolutionary organizations or family members suffering from failed harvests. At the same time, the politics of the homeland provided the opportunity for ideologues and nationalists at home and in the mahjar to craft novel identities. While scholars have changed the definition of ethnicity, the example of the Arabic-speaking colonies displays that these actors were just as involved in fashioning new ethno-national identities as scholars have been in ascribing classifications.

Arabic-speakers in Argentina also contributed to local politics. While assessing the role of immigrants’ formal political involvement, such as elections, is vital, scholars must broaden the definition of political involvement to better assess the various avenues of participation. Members of this colony achieved important roles in provincial governments by 1917; others sought seats on the municipal council. Men resorted to

\textsuperscript{11} In the essay “Challenging Particularity,” Jeff Lesser and Raanan Rein suggest eight propositions for new approaches to ethnic studies, including the need for more gender analysis. Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, “Challenging Particularity,” 255-258.
work stoppages to protest against perceived transgressions on the part of management. Still others sat on boards of directors for local public orphanages and trade associations.\textsuperscript{12} Women actively pursued their rights in courts and raised money for public institutions and the impoverished. The cumulative effect of these efforts shows that immigrants from Greater Syria were consequential in local Argentine politics and this broad participation was not restricted to the second generation.\textsuperscript{13}

The economic, judicial, philanthropic and political activities of Arabic-speaking immigrants also dispel the historiography’s emphasis that racist and prejudicial discourses were debilitating daily realities. Language of this sort did exist; however, there was “a gap between rhetoric and social practice.”\textsuperscript{14} Social, gender and economic positions influenced how powerful prejudicial rhetoric could translate into altercations. In fact, these discourses likely did affect the arrest rates of Syrians and Lebanese in Tucumán by local police forces. Yet, it is clear this immigrant group successfully utilized state institutions, joined elite Argentine social associations, became leading merchants, and married into local families.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{12} Wadi Schamún, based on his charitable contributions, held a seat on the police orphanage’s board of directors in Buenos Aires as early as 1906. See “Los árabes en la República,” \textit{La Prensa}, November 17, 1906.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{13} Nancy Foner has called for more research on immigrants and local politics; however, her suggestions are limited to conventional notions of political participation such as electoral politics. Nancy Foner, “The Challenge and Promise of Past-Present Comparisons,” \textit{Journal of American Ethnic Studies} 25, no. 4 (2006): 146; Lesser and Rein, “Challenging Particularity,” 258.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{14} Lesser and Rein, “Challenging Particularity,” 257.
\end{flushleft}
The theoretical framework of transnationalism offers many attractive avenues for historical studies of migration. The construction of these “multi-stranded social relations” suggests a variety of arrangements among immigrants in the host society, such as mutual aid institutions and hometown civic committees, and with their peers in the homeland, such as alliances with political parties or business firms. Yet, it says little in regard to how local society reacted to and engaged with these immigrants. This model says even less about how changes in the economy, the enforcement of legal codes, access to state institutions, and ideologies informed the actions of immigrants. These “conditions” illustrate the opportunities and limitations placed upon immigrant groups and how they change over time.

The example of Arabic-speaking immigrants in Argentina historicizes many assertions by theorists of transnationalism. Argentine immigration records show more than eighty percent of people from the Levant permanently settled in the River Plate; however, this number should not suggest a rupture with the homeland. It is clear from the Arabic-language press produced in Argentina and elsewhere in the Americas that those abroad considered themselves to be part of their homeland at every level –

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politically, socially, and economically. Immigrants were in constant contact with family members and friends back home and in other locations throughout the Americas. These people used new technologies such as the wire telegraph, the standardized international mail service, and the increasingly fast service of steamships to allay fears of distant relatives, cajole others to migrate into the mahjar, and send money back home. These processes experienced by migrants of the early twentieth century and those of the present-day differ by degree and not by type.

The descendants of Arabic-speaking immigrants permeate all aspects of life in Argentina. The Syrian-Lebanese communities are a political force in the northwestern provinces, having produced governors and vice-governors in Tucumán, La Rioja, Salta, and Catamarca and a president, Carlos Menem (r. 1989-1999). Dozens have represented these districts in the national Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The political disposition of the Syrian-Lebanese is far more diverse than the calls in the early 1930s to become a voting block for the Radical Party. For instance, Julio César Saleme, admitted to the bar in 1943, became the first member of the Syrian-Lebanese colony to win election as mayor of San Miguel de Tucumán. As a high school student, Saleme performed in student theatrical productions along with future cultural and political luminaries, most notably the poet Gustavo Bravo Figueroa and future Radical governor and Presidential candidate Celestino Gelsi. As an adult, Saleme was a leading member of the Tucumán branch of the Partido Socialista Argentino, which emerged after the

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overthrow of Perón in 1955.19 Salma Haidar, the current President of the Islamic Center of Jujuy and a Peronist, became the first woman on the Board of Directors of the Syrian-Lebanese Society of Jujuy, the first woman appointed to a provincial ministerial position (Social Welfare) and the first to reach the summit of Chañi mountain, the second highest point in Argentina. Haidar is also the first public official to use the Qur’an for her swearing in ceremony. The Syrian-Lebanese communities of northwestern Argentina continue to be an economic force. Amin Massuh, Víctor’s brother, became one of the country’s largest paper industrialists, a career he began as a child working in their father’s stationery shop on Junin Street in San Miguel de Tucumán. Fouad Asfoura, from Rabah, Syria, developed the largest wholesale textile outlet in Tucumán, a firm now run by his children and grandchildren.

The descendants of Arabic-speaking immigrants have been active and influential in provincial and national cultural circles. They have achieved recognition as writers, ballet dancers, sculptors, architects, composers, and musicians. Perhaps the most influential was Víctor Massuh, the son of Protestant immigrant from Hama, and one of Argentina’s most important philosophers in the twentieth century. Massuh was very active at an early age in his cultural and intellectual pursuits. In 1942, at age eighteen, he co-founded a short-lived periodical entitled La Palestra (The Arena, as in a place to debate and discuss) and published a treatise on the Paraguayan philosopher Rafael Barrett.

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the following year; before he enrolled at the National University of Tucumán. By the time Massuh relocated to Buenos Aires in 1951, he had been a member of “La Carpa,” a group of writers from northwestern Argentina, co-founded another magazine entitled *Vispera (Prelude)*, collaborated with the Mexican journal *Cuadernos Americanos (American Notebooks)* at the proposal of Spanish writer León Felipe, and helped form both the Center for Philosophical Reading and the “Gibrán Jalil Gibrán” Athenaeum. He served as interim dean in the College of Philosophy and Humanities at the National University of Córdoba in 1955. After postgraduate work in Germany and the United States, he began teaching at the University of Buenos Aires. In the following years, he published several philosophical tracts. The military regime appointed Massuh Ambassador to UNESCO in 1976, becoming President of its Executive Council in 1980. He later served as Argentine Ambassador to Belgium from 1989 to 1995 under the Peronist Carlos Menem.²⁰

The religious institutions established in the early part of the twentieth century remain. A clergyman from Lebanon heads the Maronite Church in Tucumán. The Orthodox Church continues its works of charity, running a soup kitchen in the township of Mariano Moreno. The Pan-Islamic Society provides a space of sociability. The Syrian-Lebanese Society is still an important fixture for political aspirants and merchants of the colony. Other institutions also serve an important purpose for socializing. The Lebanese Association and the Arab Argentine Institute, a largely ʿAlawite organization, are two examples of entities that cater to particular segments of the community. The

occasional visit by the Syrian or Lebanese Ambassadors on the respective days of independence generates broad excitement, if only fleeting.

For many of the descendants of immigrants from Greater Syria, the expression of a cultural or ethnic identity in contemporary Argentina is more about local issues and concerns than a commitment to their ancestral homeland. Yet, an understanding of a shared past between the generations and among Argentines of Syrian and Lebanese descent does persist. Youth movements and clubs based on a collective identity are filled with children from the colony. Parents baptize their children in Maronite and Orthodox churches. Most of the current generation, however, neither speaks Arabic nor has visited the Levant. This is not to say that the expression and experience of a Syrian-Argentine or Lebanese-Argentine is inauthentic. The contemporary identity of this community, rather, is distinct from that of their parents and grandparents. The symbols have changed meaning, the boundaries have shifted, and the question of who can associate or not in the community is still a central concern.
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*Jirāb al-Hāwi* (Buenos Aires)

*al-Mahjar* (San Miguel de Tucumán)

*al-Mursal* (Buenos Aires)

*al-Naṣr* (San Miguel de Tucumán)

*al-Saʿāda* (San Miguel de Tucumán)

Ṣada al-Šarq (San Miguel de Tucumán)

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Appendix A: Probability

The following probability tables demonstrate the likelihood of arrest or particular vocation. The data is culled from provincial statistical annuals, *Anuario de Estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán*, and 1913 census of San Miguel de Tucumán. The population figures derive from the 1909 provincial and 1914 national censuses. After these two surveys, there was neither a provincial nor a national census conducted until 1947. The later tally did not distinguish among immigrants in any detailed manner. Spaniards and Italians, for instance, were categorized simply as Europeans. Syrians, Japanese, and Chinese registered as Asians. In calculating the probability tables, I tried to be as specific as possible in organizing the data. For instance, in Appendix A.1, Syrian males accounted for fourteen percent of all immigrant exogamous marriages in the province between 1907 and 1913 while only registering as ten percent of the foreign born male population. I then divided the “exogamous marriage” number by the “immigrant male population” figure to arrive at the probability result. If the probability result equals one, then the group was no more or less likely to have an exogamous marriage than any other community. If the answer is less than one, then that set of males was less likely than the average immigrant to marry outside their national group. If the number is greater than one, then those males are more likely to marry outside their community. Arrest
probabilities are calculated in the same fashion. In Appendix A.2, the percentages of immigrant arrests are divided according to nationality.

### Appendix A.1

**Probability of Exogamous Marriage among Immigrant Groups**  
Province of Tucumán, 1907-1913

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Probability</th>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.66</td>
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### Appendix A.2

**Probability of Arrest for Aggravated Assault among Immigrant Groups**  
Province of Tucumán, 1907-1913

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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Arrests</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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### Appendix A.3

**Probability of Arrest for Larceny among Immigrant Groups**  
Province of Tucumán, 1907-1913

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Appendix A.4

Probability of Arrest for *Public Intoxication* among Immigrant Groups
Province of Tucumán, 1907-1913

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<th>Nationality</th>
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<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>0.64</td>
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Appendix A.5

Probability of Arrest for *Illegal Use of a Firearm* among Immigrant Groups
Province of Tucumán, 1907-1913

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<td>Italian</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.39</td>
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</table>

Appendix A.6

Probability of Occupation as *Merchant* among Immigrant Groups
Province of Tucumán, 1913

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Occupation</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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Appendix A.7

Probability of Occupation as *Itinerant Peddler* among Immigrant Groups
Province of Tucumán, 1913

<table>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Occupation</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>8.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
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<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
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<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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Appendix A.8

Probability of Occupation as *Day Laborer* among Immigrant Groups
Province of Tucumán, 1913

<table>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Occupation</th>
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<th>Probability</th>
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</thead>
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<td>0.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<td>1.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.57</td>
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Appendix A.9

Probability of Occupation as *Shoe Shiner* among Immigrant Groups
Province of Tucumán, 1913

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Occupation</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>5.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>0.27</td>
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<td>0.96</td>
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</table>
**Appendix A.10**

**Probability of Occupation as *Baker* among Immigrant Groups**  
**Province of Tucumán, 1913**

<table>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Occupation</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
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**Appendix A.11**

**Probability of Occupation as *Shoemaker* among Immigrant Groups**  
**Province of Tucumán, 1913**

<table>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Occupation</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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<td>0.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
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**Appendix A.12**

**Probability of Occupation as *Carpenter* among Immigrant Groups**  
**Province of Tucumán, 1913**

<table>
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<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Occupation</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Population</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman</td>
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<td>Spaniard</td>
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<td>1.13</td>
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<tr>
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### Appendix A.13

**Probability of Exogamous Marriage among Immigrant Groups**
Province of Tucumán, 1914-1917

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Exogamous Marriage</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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### Appendix A.14

**Probability of Arrest for Aggravated Assault among Immigrant Groups**
Province of Tucumán, 1914-1916

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Arrests</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
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### Appendix A.15

**Probability of Arrest for Larceny among Immigrant Groups**
Province of Tucumán, 1914-1916

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Portion of Arrests</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottoman</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
<td>2.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spaniard</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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### Appendix A.16

**Probability of Prosecution for *Homicide***
Province of Tucumán, 1934-1942

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Portion of Prosecutions</th>
<th>Portion of Population</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syrian-Lebanese</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaniards</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italians</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argentines</td>
<td>0.856</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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### Appendix A.17

**Probability of Prosecution for *Aggravated Assault***
Province of Tucumán, 1934-1942

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Portion of Prosecutions</th>
<th>Portion of Population</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syrian-Lebanese</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>1.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spaniards</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.047</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italians</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.240</td>
<td>0.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argentines</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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### Appendix A.18

**Probability of Arrest for *Disorderly Conduct*** among Immigrants
Province of Tucumán, 1934-1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant Group</th>
<th>Portion of Arrests</th>
<th>Portion of Immigrant Pop</th>
<th>Probability</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Syrian-Lebanese</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaniards</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italians</td>
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<td>0.54</td>
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