FORGING ETHNIC IDENTITY THROUGH FAITH: RELIGION AND THE SYRIAN-LEBANESE COMMUNITY IN SÃO PAULO

By

Montie Bryan Pitts Jr.

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Jane L. Landers

James J. Lang

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Introduction

The *festas juninas* are one of the highlights of winter in Brazil. During the second half of the month of June, the Catholic liturgical calendar commemorates a variety of important feast days – Corpus Christi on the fifteenth, St. John on the twenty-fourth, and Sts. Peter and Paul on the twenty-ninth. Communities across the country hold celebrations to mark the *festas*, and Brazilians turn out *en masse*, in theory to honor the saints, but in reality more to enjoy themselves eating traditional *festa junina* food and socializing with friends and family. In June 2005, I attended a rather different type of *festa junina* in São Paulo. This *festa* occurred in the shadow of an Eastern Orthodox cathedral built as a one-sixth replica of the famed Hagia Sofia in Istanbul. Alongside traditional *festa junina* fare such as *paçoca*, *pê de moleque*, *pomonha*, and *batata doce na brasa*, attendees enjoyed Arab specialties like *falafel*, *esfihas*, and *baklava*. Most of them conversed in Portuguese, but some, especially the older attendees, carried on animated conversations in Arabic.

This type of social drama repeats itself every day in hundreds of cities and towns across Brazil, as *batata doce* and *baklava*, Portuguese and Arabic, Roman Catholic festivals and Eastern liturgy interact and co-mingle in the Arab Brazilian community, which is made up almost entirely of immigrants from Syria and Lebanon and their descendants, the majority of whom are Christians of the Eastern rite.[1] Since their arrival in Brazil over a century ago, Arab Brazilians have become unmistakably Brazilian, yet they continue to take pride in their Arab roots and celebrate their distinctive cuisine, language, and religions. Even as they have gone to great lengths to prove that although they are neither European, indigenous, or African, they can stake a legitimate claim to Brazilianness, Arab Brazilians have made a concerted effort to preserve their own unique cultural traditions.

Arab Brazilians have created, re-created, and maintained ethnic identity in a variety of arenas over the last century. While they have had to contend with the labels and stereotypes placed upon them by Brazilian society, they have also been active participants in creating their Arab Brazilian identity. They have frequently boasted of their acculturation to their adopted

[1] In the interest of avoiding undue repetition, I use the terms Arab Brazilian and Syrian-Lebanese interchangeably throughout this thesis, since the vast majority of Arab Brazilians are of Syrian-Lebanese descent. Nevertheless, this thesis studies only the Syrian-Lebanese community in São Paulo and does not attempt to address Arab immigrants of other national origins. In my interviews with members of the community, I discovered that some interviewees preferred *sírio-libanês* (Syrian-Lebanese), while others preferred simply *sírio*, *libanês*, *descendente de sírios*, or *descendente de libaneses*. None used the terms *árabe* or *árabe-brasileiro* unless I mentioned them first.

nation, especially during times of heightened Brazilian nationalism, but at the same time insist on the validity and importance of their Syrian-Lebanese heritage. Over the last century, Arabic-language newspapers, the works of Arab Brazilian intellectuals, and elite social clubs have all served as important forums in which Arab Brazilians have shaped their ethnic identity, and recent scholarship has recognized the part that these institutions play in shaping the community's view of itself.

The role that religious institutions play in maintaining community cohesion and shaping ethnic identity, however, has received comparatively little attention from scholars, an inexplicable omission since religion plays a powerful role in shaping identity in both Syria and Lebanon. This thesis will seek to address this gap in the literature by discussing how the various religions that the Syrian-Lebanese practice create, interact with, influence, and are influenced by Arab, Syrian, and Lebanese national and ethnic identity. I will begin with an overview of the history of the Arab colony in Brazil, with a discussion of the Brazilian reaction to Syrian-Lebanese immigration and the Syrian-Lebanese response, as well as a summary of the social trajectory of the colony. I will then discuss the research already conducted by Brazilian and foreign scholars regarding the Arab Brazilian community. The remainder of the thesis will consist of original research focusing on the role that religion currently plays in shaping and maintaining ethnic identity among Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil, and on the ways in which the community and Brazilian culture in turn influence religious institutions. I will look primarily at Eastern Christians of the Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, and Maronite Catholic churches, but I will also discuss other Eastern Christian groups, Muslims, Druze, mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants, and practitioners of *umbanda*. Each of these groups helps create the Syrian-Lebanese community's view of what it means to be a Brazilian of Arab descent and how ethnic heritage connects to being a member of that religious group.

History of the Syrian-Lebanese colony in Brazil

Conflicting immigration statistics

Between the 1870s and the present, thousands of Syrians and Lebanese abandoned their homeland and relocated to Brazil. Reliable numbers for the entire 125 years of the migratory movement are not available, but Jeffrey Lesser, citing the *Revista de Imigração e Colonização*,

lists 107,135 Middle Eastern immigrants during the heaviest period of Syrian-Lebanese immigration, from 1884-1939.[2] Clark Knowlton provides a similar figure of 106,184 Middle Eastern immigrants between 1871 and 1942.[3] Knowlton's statistics indicate that the number of immigrants before 1895 was quite small, and the number of immigrants after 1938 was similarly insignificant. The highest number of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants entered Brazil in the decade before and after World War I, with several thousand arriving annually. The numbers dropped off in the late 1930s, when the Brazilian government tightened restrictions on immigration, and came to a virtual halt in the early 1940s, during World War II. Immigration recommenced in the late 1940s, but relatively few immigrants arrived until armed conflict beset Lebanon in 1975. During the Lebanese civil war and ensuing conflicts with Israel and Syria, immigration increased to perhaps several hundred per year, but the numbers never approached those of the early twentieth century. All told, probably fewer than 150,000 Syrians and Lebanese have immigrated to Brazil since the 1870s, with the majority arriving before World War II. It is impossible to ascertain the number of descendants of Syrians and Lebanese living in Brazil today, since in order to facilitate pronunciation in Portuguese or in order to better fit in, many families changed their last names after arriving from the Middle East. Furthermore, the Syrian-Lebanese and their descendants frequently intermarried with native-born Brazilians and other immigrants, and a descendant of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants could simultaneously be a descendant of Italians, Portuguese, Jews, indigenous Brazilians, Afro-Brazilians, and any number of other groups.

This modest estimate of 150,000 contrasts markedly with estimates provided by members of the Syrian-Lebanese community. In 1945 the Arab Brazilian author Tanus Jorge Bastani claimed that there were 2,000,000 Lebanese and Lebanese descendants living in Brazil.[4] A recent article about São Paulo's immigrant communities in the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper asserted that there are currently 1,000,000 Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and their descendants in the city (*Folha de São Paulo*, April 4, 2006). In my own research, a Lebanese-descended priest

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[2] Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1999), 49.

[3] Clark S. Knowlton, *Spatial and Social Mobility of the Syrians and Lebanese in the City of São Paulo, Brazil* (Doctoral Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1955), 59. Since immigrants from Syria and Lebanon before World War I carried passports from the Ottoman Empire, Brazilian immigration officials often classified them as *turcos* (Turks). Lebanese did not appear as a category until 1926, shortly after France separated Lebanon and Syria into separate protectorates after World War I. From 1927 onward, the number of immigrants designated as *turcos* decreased dramatically, from 3,370 in 1926 to only 203 in 1927.

[4] Tanus Jorge Bastani, *O Líbano e os libaneses no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: C. Mendes Junior, 1945), 139.

at the Orthodox cathedral in São Paulo, which is composed mostly of Syrian descendants (with a Lebanese minority), claimed in an interview that 6,000,000 Syrians and Lebanese immigrated to Brazil, mostly before 1940, and that the majority of the immigrants were from Syria. The Lebanese deacon at the majority Lebanese Melkite Catholic cathedral provided a figure of 9,000,000 descendants of immigrants, of whom 8,000,000 were reputed to be Lebanese, and the parish priest at the Maronite cathedral asserted that there are more Lebanese in Brazil than in Lebanon. As other authors have pointed out, such inflated figures serve to "enlarge the success of the adaptation of [Syrians and] Lebanese to Brazil"[5] and to "strengthen their place in the Brazilian nation."[6] In addition, while the figures provided by both Syrian and Lebanese sources were wildly inflated, it is telling that each group respectively depicts itself as the majority among the Arab Brazilian community, implying a degree of competition or tension between the two.

Early Syrian-Lebanese immigrants to Brazil

The migratory movement from Syria and Lebanon to Brazil began in 1871, although legends abound of an ancient Phoenician or Arab presence in Brazil, and a few Arabs undoubtedly found their way to Brazil before 1871. Syrian-Lebanese chroniclers and biographers of the mid-twentieth century placed the Phoenicians, the ancient inhabitants of present-day Lebanon, in Brazil centuries before Christ, claiming that they voyaged up the Amazon and, along with their Israelite shipmates, named the Rio Solimões (the name of the Amazon above Manaus) in honor of King Solomon of Israel.[7] Inscriptions discovered on the Pedra da Gávea in Rio de Janeiro are "clearly" in ancient Phoenician text; in fact, the Phoenician presence in the New World was so extensive that they managed to found several major civilizations in other areas of the Americas, including the Maya, Toltec, and Aztec.[8] Chroniclers also frequently cited the centuries-long presence of the Moors in Portugal as proof of a Luso-Arab connection dating back centuries and claimed that Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to

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[5] Andre Gattaz, *Historia oral da imigração libanesa para o Brasil – 1880-2000* (Doctoral Dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo, 2001), 157.

[6] John Tofik Karam, *Distinguishing Arabesques: The Politics and Pleasures of Being Arab in Neoliberal Brazil* (Doctoral Dissertation, Syracuse University, 2004), 12.

[7] Bastani, 155. Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals until the present have continued to mention the possibility of an ancient Phoenician presence in Brazil and note that a seafaring civilization that established trading posts throughout the Mediterranean theoretically could have made the relatively short jump across the Atlantic from Africa to Brazil, although they acknowledge that such a voyage has never been definitively proven. See Roberto Khatlab, *Mahjar: saga libanesa no Brasil* (Zalka, Lebanon: Mokhtarat, 2002), 13-14.

[8] Bastani, 155-156.

Spain and Portugal were aboard the voyages of Columbus and Cabral.[9] Still other Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals mentioned the presence of Muslim African slaves during the colonial era and imperial period as, at the very least, evidence of an Islamic (and hence Arab) influence on Brazilian culture.[10] An oft-repeated tale involving an earlier Middle Eastern presence in Brazil is that of a "*turco*" businessman living in Rio de Janeiro named Elie Antun Lubus who allowed the Portuguese royal family to take up residence in his home when they arrived in the country in 1808.[11] In one of the only documented examples of a Middle Eastern or Arab presence in Brazil prior to 1871, Lesser notes the presence of Arabic-speaking Jewish immigrants from Morocco in Belém do Pará in the early nineteenth century.[12]

Whatever the historicity of claims to a primordial Syrian-Lebanese or Arab presence in Brazil, the modern migratory movement from Syria and Lebanon to Brazil did not begin until 1871 and did not start to occur in large numbers until 1895. From the 1890s onward, the entry of Syrians and Lebanese ebbed and flowed with the rapidly fluctuating political and economic climate in the Middle East and changing Brazilian immigration policies, with new immigrants continuing to arrive all the way until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Andre Gattaz divides the migratory movement into four major periods, which while admittedly arbitrary, provide a convenient framework for discussion. The first period began in 1880 and ended with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and its division between France and Great Britain in 1920. The second period includes the years between the world wars, during French rule of Syria and Lebanon, and runs from 1921-1940. The third period covers the years 1941-1970 and includes the era between World War II and the Lebanese civil war. The fourth and final period began in 1971 and continues to the present. It is marked by the Lebanese civil war and constant conflict with Israel and Syria.[13] Each period features different motivations for immigration, different factors that made Brazil an attractive destination, and different demographic characteristics of the immigrants. Some characteristics of the migratory movement, however, transcend these periods and have remained constant over 125 years of Syrian-Lebanese immigration to Brazil.

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9 Ibid., 156. See also Khatlab (2002), 18 and Claude Hajjar, *Imigração árabe: cem anos de reflexão* (São Paulo: Icone Editora, 1985), 21.

10 Jorge Safady, *A imigração árabe no Brasil (1880-1971)* (Doctoral Dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo, 1972), 77-78 and Hajjar, 22.

11 See, for example, Bastani, 127 and Khatlab (2002), 19.

12 Lesser, 45.

13 Gattaz, 24-25.

These include principally the desire to escape religious and political violence in the Middle East, a search for new economic opportunities, and a propensity in Brazil toward employment in commerce rather than agriculture.

Causes of Syrian-Lebanese immigration

Descendants of immigrants from the Middle East today list religious persecution of Christians at the hands of the Ottoman Turks and a search for improved economic opportunities as the principal reasons their ancestors left Syria and Lebanon.[14] One source related to me that his father and uncle left Syria just after World War I, after the Turks massacred the rest of their family, and stories like this figure prominently in the memory of the community. Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals frequently offer varying reasons based on their own ideological agenda. Jorge Safady, for example, seeks to deemphasize national and religious differences between the immigrants and claims that Christians and Muslims alike sought to escape Ottoman cultural oppression of Arabs and find liberty in Brazil.[15] While religious or cultural persecution and lack of economic opportunity dominate the collective memory of the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil today, motivations to emigrate from the Middle East were as varied as the immigrants themselves, with religious, political, economic, and personal situations creating a complex web of stimuli that pushed Syrians and Lebanese away from home.

Prior to the 1920s, the territory encompassed by the modern nations of Syria and Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire and was known as Greater Syria. Within Greater Syria, the Ottomans permitted the small area around Mount Lebanon a degree of autonomy due to the presence of a Christian majority (with a large Druze and Muslim minority). The migratory movement has its roots in the 1840s, when poor Ottoman administration of the region and Muslim and Druze unease with a Maronite Catholic community that was increasing quickly in both numbers and ambition led to a series of religious conflicts and European interventions to

[14] These two reasons have come up repeatedly in interviews conducted with immigrants and their descendants since the 1950s. In my own interviews, I observed that Christian members of the community who are actively involved in their church tend to cite religious persecution first, while more secular members of the community more frequently cite economic motivations as the reason for their ancestors' migration.

[15] Jorge Safady (1972), 72. Of course, if this were accurate, one would expect to see just as many Arab Muslims as Arab Christians fleeing Syria and Lebanon during the Ottoman era. Instead, Muslims made up only a small minority of the immigrants until after World War II.

restore order.[16] In the bloodiest confrontation, in 1860, the Druze, working in collaboration with the Ottoman authorities, massacred over 10,000 Maronites. In the wake of the massacre, England, France, and other European governments intervened and pressured the Ottoman government to offer increased autonomy to the Maronites in the area around Mount Lebanon, in the heart of the modern-day nation of Lebanon. Despite their increased autonomy, many Christians felt increasingly insecure and worried that another massacre could occur at the whim of the Ottoman authorities. Many consequently started to consider leaving Lebanon, and some began to depart for other parts of the Mediterranean, Western Europe, or the United States. The urge to emigrate was strengthened by the presence of Protestant missionaries who had begun arriving in the 1830s. The missionaries established schools, mostly in the area around Mount Lebanon, introducing Syrians and Lebanese to Western culture and teaching Arabic literature and history. For the first time, Syrians and Lebanese had access to information about the West, and many came to see America, from whence most of the missionaries came, as a land of untold economic opportunity and fabulous riches.[17]

Christian fears of renewed Ottoman oppression began to be realized in the early twentieth century, when with World War I looming, the Turks eliminated the traditional Christian exemption from military service and began drafting young Christian males into the Ottoman military. These new recruits soon found that they were targets for mistreatment by their Muslim Turkish commanders, and they quickly began to desert. Rather than risk capture and the harsh penalties for deserting, many young men chose to emigrate, and many others chose to emigrate in order to avoid being drafted in the first place, often joining relatives overseas who had already emigrated.[18] After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, Syria and Lebanon became French protectorates. With the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, the inhabitants

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[16] The religious situation in Syria and Lebanon can be utterly confusing, with over a dozen separate groups officially recognized in Lebanon. Most of the groups also have adherents in Syria. The major ones are Maronite Catholics (Lebanese Catholics of the Eastern rite who profess to have remained faithful to Rome after the Great Schism of 1054 separated the Catholic and Orthodox churches), Melkite Catholics (Eastern rite Catholics who left the Orthodox Church and reunited with Rome in 1724), Antiochian Orthodox (Eastern, or Greek, Orthodox who fall under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, currently headquartered in Damascus), Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims, and Druze (a religion that claims to be a sect of Islam but combines elements of Islam, Christianity, and neo-Platonism and is considered a separate religion by Sunni and Shiite Muslims). Other smaller groups include Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Alawite Muslims, and Jews. The Armenians are not native to Syria and Lebanon but immigrated there as a result of the genocide perpetrated by the Turkish government in their homeland at the end of World War I.

[17] Knowlton, 25-26.

[18] Ibid., 33-34.

of Greater Syria had hoped for and expected independence, and many felt a keen sense of betrayal when England and France instead divided the empire between them. The French turned out to be much more effective administrators than the Ottomans, whose control over non-Turkish areas of the empire had never been consistently strong. Due to French attempts to impose their language and culture, some Syrians and Lebanese viewed the French as worse overlords than the Ottomans, and many chose to emigrate rather than tolerate another foreign ruler.[19]

In addition to religious and political reasons, a lack of economic opportunity in the Middle East played a vital role in stimulating immigration during the first two phases of the migratory movement. Due to rapid population growth in the middle of the nineteenth century, the land, especially in Lebanon, was unable to support the number of people living on it.[20] Many descendants of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants to Brazil cite the tendency toward large families in Syria and Lebanon and the division of agricultural plots among all male heirs. The construction of the Suez Canal diverted trade from the traditional overland trade routes through the region, leaving merchants, mostly Christians, without work.[21] In addition, the silk industry played a vital role, particularly in Lebanon, between the 1850s and the 1880s. Silk plantations employed a large number of people, and salaried labor introduced them to capitalist economic relationships, including the consumption of products like coffee, sugar, and rice that they had previously considered luxuries. However, as silk production shifted toward Asia near the close of the century, the price of silk plummeted. As the employees of the silk industry saw their livelihood endangered, they began to search for other economic options and accumulation strategies. With political and religious conflicts already wracking the region, emigration often became an attractive option with a promise of lucrative economic return.[22] Emigration could also be economically advantageous for village leaders in Syria and Lebanon, as ticket agents and money lenders often encouraged immigration and paid village leaders a commission for each person they convinced to book passage.[23] Emigrants leaving Syria and Lebanon due to economic reasons often dreamed of making their fortune in America and returning home to their

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19 Gattaz, 77-78; Knowlton, 35; Betty Grieber, Lina Maluf, and Vera Mattar, *Memórias da imigração: libaneses e sírios em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Discurso Editoria, 1998), 22.

20 Gattaz, 73; Knowlton, 35.

21 Knowlton, 35.

22 Karam, 54-57.

23 Knowlton, 39-40.

families.[24] Life was often not as easy in the New World as they had expected, however, and not many achieved the fabulous riches that would allow them to return to Syria or Lebanon in triumph. For emigrants leaving the Middle East due to religious persecution, moving back was not a viable option so long as the Ottomans were in power. Once the Ottomans were gone, Syria and Lebanon passed under the control of another power, and the immigrants had already begun to build families and businesses in Brazil. Nevertheless, many still did return, and Lesser noted that between 1908 and 1936, almost half as many Syrian-Lebanese left Brazil through the port of Santos as entered.[25]

As they left home, the destination of choice for most Syrians and Lebanese was the United States. Indeed, many of the earliest Arabs to arrive in Brazil in the 1870s and 1880s appear to have chosen Brazil as an alternative after being denied entry to the United States due to a physical ailment. Unscrupulous ship operators and ticket agents also helped direct immigrants to Brazil. In order to avoid the cost of transporting immigrants rejected by the United States all the way back to Syria or Lebanon, ship operators sometimes dropped their passengers off in Rio de Janeiro or Santos, telling them that this was simply another part of America. In the same way, ticket agents and shipping operators who sold tickets and sailed to South America were eager to share in the profits enjoyed by shipping operators that traveled to the United States and sold tickets to Brazil to unsuspecting immigrants, telling them that their ships also took immigrants to America. Many Syrians and Lebanese thus arrived in Brazil thinking it was another port of the United States. As immigrants established themselves in Brazil and began to reap profits and send money home to relatives, Brazil began to emerge as a legitimate destination in its own right. Successful immigrants who had started businesses in Brazil wrote home and invited brothers, cousins, and friends from their villages to join them in Brazil and help with the business. When villagers in Lebanon saw the prosperity of neighbors whose relatives in Brazil sent remittances, they also came to see Brazil as a land of great economic opportunity.[26] In addition, since the overwhelming majority of the earliest immigrants were young, single males, many of them wrote

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[24] Jorge Safady, *O Líbano no Brasil*. (São Paulo: Editora Comercial Safady, 1956), 23.
[25] Lesser, 54.
[26] Knowlton, 49-50, 56.

home asking for their family to send a suitable wife or traveled home themselves to find one, and as a result, many Syrian and Lebanese women made the trip to Brazil.[27]

Turco peddlers and store owners

Upon arriving in Brazil, immigrants from Syria and Lebanon were shocked to discover that Brazilians did not see them as Arabs, Syrians, Lebanese, or inhabitants of their village. Instead, since their passports were issued by the Ottoman Empire, Syrians and Lebanese were called *turcos* – Turks – both in official documents and in popular parlance.[28] Since many of them had come to Brazil precisely to escape Turkish oppression, the immigrants almost universally resented their *turco* designation, preferring to be called *sírios* or, after the creation of Lebanon as a French protectorate, *libaneses*. In addition, the *turco* designation had the added problem of not recognizing the regional and religious differences that were so important in the Middle East. For Brazilians, anyone coming from the Middle East was a *turco*, regardless of whether they considered themselves Syrians, Lebanese, citizens of a particular city or village, Orthodox, Maronite, Melkite, Druze, or Muslim.[29] By the early twentieth century, immigration statistics begin to show *turco-árabe* as a national origin, and about the same time, the term *sírio* also came into use. Members of the colony took exception to this tendency to lump all Middle Easterners into one *turco* or *sírio* category. Taufik Duoun, for example, noted that although Argentines and Uruguayans speak the same language and have similar customs, Brazilians recognize that they comprise two distinct nationalities, and he argued that Syrians and Lebanese

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[27] In a unique twist on this familiar story, one interviewee related that his grandfather came to Brazil when a close family friend who had immigrated several years before wrote home and asked his father to send a son to marry his daughter in Brazil. In the majority of cases, however, it appears to have been young men who sought wives from the Middle East.

[28] Although *turco* was the dominant label used in Brazil, in some regions Brazilians used other terms to refer to Syrian-Lebanese immigrants. In Pará, they were called *judeus*, since most of them worked as peddlers, a profession that had been recently dominated in the region by European Jewish immigrants. Inhabitants of Ceará called them *galegos*, a derogatory term for the Portuguese, while in parts of Ceará, Maranhão, and Pará, they were called *carcamanos*, a pejorative term for Italians. See Jamil Safady, *O café e o mascate* (São Paulo: Editora Comercial Safady, 1973), 115-117.

[29] Oswaldo Truzzi, "Lebanese in Brazil," in *Lebanese Migrants to Brazil: an Annotated Bibliography*, ed. Roberto Khatlab (Louaize, Lebanon: Lebanese Emigration Research Center, 2005), 45.

should be viewed in the same way, despite their cultural and linguistic similarities.[30] After World War I, with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of French colonial rule, and the subsequent division of Greater Syria into Syria and Lebanon, *libanês* begins to appear as a category, and by the 1930s, Lebanese insistence on acknowledgment as a separate group led to the introduction of the term *sírio-libanês*, a term that continues in popular and academic usage to this day.

Whether they were called *turcos*, *turco-árabes*, or *sírios*, Arabs were only one of many groups that began immigrating to Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century. Brazilian coffee planters in the 1880s, eager for a new labor source to replace their slaves that they knew would soon be emancipated, and even more eager to modernize their nation with the civilizing and whitening influences of European immigrants, strongly encouraged immigration from European countries. They preferred Northern Europeans like Germans and Scandinavians, but if those were in short supply, Portuguese, Spanish, Italians, and Eastern Europeans could prove acceptable, as well. Altogether unacceptable were Africans or Asians, and in 1890 the new republican government issued a decree requiring special congressional approval for the entry of these groups.[31] Although Syrians and Lebanese were geographically Asians, the decree appears to have had East Asians like Chinese and Japanese in mind, and immigration from the Middle East continued to increase throughout the 1890s. Perhaps the reason they were not specifically banned was because Syrians and Lebanese simply never entered the equation in the minds of Brazilian elites, and their immigration to Brazil was neither sought nor expected.[32] Furthermore, once they started arriving in Brazil, their refusal to work in "proper" immigrant jobs like agriculture and factory labor meant that the government would not actively encourage the entry of more immigrants from Syria and Lebanon.[33] As a result, the Syrian-Lebanese immigration has the distinction of being the only major migratory movement to Brazil that was spontaneous and not supported by any government, and many Syrian-Lebanese authors and members of the

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[30] Taufik Duoun, *A emigração sírio-libanesa ás terras de promissão* (São Paulo: Tipografia Editora Árabe, 1944), 11.

[31] Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 137-138.

[32] Lesser, 45. Several Syrian-Lebanese authors relate, however, that during his visit to Lebanon in 1876, Emperor Pedro II encouraged the temporary immigration of Middle Eastern immigrants to Brazil, promising they would return home "prosperous and happy." See Khatlab (2002), 23. Notably, Pedro did not call for Syrians or Lebanese to move to Brazil permanently, in contrast to the European colonizers sought by the landed elite.

[33] Campos, Mintaha A., *Turco pobre, sírio remediado, libanês rico: trajetória do imigrante libanês no Espírito Santo* (Vitória, Brazil: Instituto Jones dos Santos Neves, 1987), 54.

community have taken pride in noting that their ancestors paid their own way to Brazil, without the subsidization of their own or the Brazilian government.[34] Unlike the other immigrant groups who arrived, however, the Syrian-Lebanese showed almost no interest in agriculture. Rather than immigrating in family groups to work on coffee plantations, they initially usually arrived as single males who were interested in making as much money as possible as quickly as possible to send home to their families. Consequently, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants overwhelmingly opted to seek employment in commerce, and a great many of them found work as itinerant peddlers selling religious trinkets, dry goods, textiles, and other products throughout the interior of Brazil, delivering products from the cities to isolated towns, plantations, and small farms. Other peddlers set up business in cities like Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, traveling door-to-door to sell the same products. When their customers were unable to pay in cash, peddlers often extended credit to their regular customers, a practice that was previously virtually unknown in Brazil. New immigrants tended to choose peddling because it required a minimum amount of start-up capital – unlike a store owner, a peddler had no overhead costs, and unlike a farmer, he had no land or agricultural equipment to purchase. Instead, the only initial investment required for a peddler was the money to purchase the items he wished to resell, and he could soon reap a high return selling at a profit in the interior, where there was a ready market for his products.

Peddling was not a viable long-term career, however, since life on the road was physically demanding and not conducive to settling down and starting a family. Just as importantly, although peddling generated enough income to survive, it was not likely to create economic security or generate the large sums of wealth required to become successful in Brazil or return home to the Middle East. Thus, as soon as they were able to afford it, most Syrian and Lebanese peddlers preferred to open a store in a city or town, most often selling textiles or dry goods.[35] This process began by the early 1890s, when the earliest immigrants had already been in Brazil for twenty years. Even after settling in towns, many immigrants left for larger cities, since they felt that cities held better educational opportunities for their children.[36] In addition, many families placed a high value on their children marrying another member of the Syrian-

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[34] Gattaz, 169-179; Greiber, Maluf, and Mattar, 105-106.

[35] Oswaldo Truzzi, "The Right Place at the Right Time: Syrians and Lebanese in Brazil and the United States, a Comparative Approach" *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16:2 (Winter 1997): 8. (Referred to henceforward as Truzzi, 1997a.)

[36] One informant stated that although his grandparents initially settled in a small city in Minas Gerais, they moved to Belo Horizonte in 1939 in order to pursue better educational opportunities for their children.

Lebanese community, and prospective Syrian-Lebanese marriage partners were scarce in the cities and towns of the interior. More than anywhere else, they concentrated in the city of São Paulo, since it represented the largest market in the state of São Paulo and contained a nucleus of Syrians and Lebanese who had already settled there as peddlers. In 1893, almanacs recorded only six businesses in São Paulo with Syrian-Lebanese proprietors; by 1901, that number had skyrocketed to 500. Syrian-Lebanese shop owners concentrated their shops along the Rua 25 de Março, a short distance north of downtown São Paulo, and the area quickly gained a reputation as the *turco* neighborhood of São Paulo. As Knowlton first noted, the choice of Rua 25 de Março represented a strategic business decision, since it lay near a major market directly between downtown São Paulo and a major train station, ensuring the constant passage of potential customers.[37] In Rio de Janeiro, Syrians and Lebanese also concentrated their shops in one area of the city, to the west of the city center, just to the east of Praça Tiradentes, and the area soon became known as "Little Turkey."[38] If their store was successful, shop owners would write home inviting family members to join them and help in the store. Many young men who came to Brazil during World War I to escape the Ottoman military draft came at the invitation of brothers, cousins, and uncles already residing there and found immediate employment in their relatives' businesses. New arrivals frequently worked as peddlers for their relatives already in Brazil, walking the streets of São Paulo to sell the same products the store sold. As customers along their route became familiar with them, they often began to purchase exclusively from their preferred Syrian-Lebanese peddler. This network of contacts served as a foundation for the new immigrant to open a store in the area where he was accustomed to peddling, and in this way, virtually every neighborhood in São Paulo gained a nucleus of Arab immigrants, usually all related and from the same village in Syria or Lebanon.[39] By the 1920s, some immigrants had also entered light industry, generally producing ready-made clothing or textiles. The manufacture of clothing and textiles expanded rapidly in Brazil during the 1920s, and many families became wealthy through their industrial ventures.[40] Nevertheless, most members of the community never became fabulously rich, since many of them suffered greatly after the Great

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37 Knowlton, 168, 175.

38 Paulo Ribeiro, "Saara, uma pequena ONU no Rio de Janeiro" *Travessia: revista do migrante* 12:34 (May 1999):
36.

39 Knowlton., 177.

40 Truzzi (1997a), 11.

Depression began in 1929, and one Syrian-Lebanese intellectual estimated that about 80% of the colony belonged to the middle class.[41]

Figure 1 – Rua 25 de Março, the traditional Syrian-Lebanese business district in São Paulo.

Figure 2 – A Syrian-Lebanese-owned shop on Rua 25 de Março in São Paulo.

Although peddling and operating a store specializing in dry goods or textiles was the most common career path for the Syrian-Lebanese, and the one Brazilians came to associate most closely with Middle Eastern immigrants, other business pursuits were not uncommon, both during the initial period of immigration (1871-1920) and later. One informant related that his grandfather settled in Oliveira, Minas Gerais in the 1930s, where he operated a variety of business ventures in transportation industry, such as bus lines, gas stations, and auto parts stores. Another interviewee stated that his father and uncle started an Arabic-language newspaper in São Paulo that published until the 1930s, when the regime of Getúlio Vargas banned publications in foreign languages. A third interviewee related that although his father started out as a peddler,

[41] Jamil Safady, *Panorama da imigração árabe* (São Paulo: Editora Comercial Safady, 1972), 18-20. See also Greiber, Maluf, and Mattar, 220.

he did so in Argentina in 1947, only moving to Brazil in 1957 after economic crisis under the Perón government in Argentina caused business to suffer there. During the heady years of the Kubitschek administration, Brazil was a much more attractive market. Peddling was certainly the preferred economic activity for a large number of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, but it was by no means the only option, nor the only path to upward social mobility. Furthermore, immigrants did not necessarily remain in the first country to which they immigrated but were willing to relocate again if they thought they would have improved economic opportunities elsewhere.

Syrian-Lebanese immigrants as non-Europeans in positivist Brazil

As Middle Eastern immigrants concentrated in major cities, especially in São Paulo, they found themselves face to face with a rapidly modernizing Brazil whose elites looked to Europe as the model of what their nation could and should become. The positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte had convinced the Brazilian elite that the forces of order and progress could create a modern, Europeanized Brazil, free of primitive African and indigenous influences. To this end, they sought to incorporate all things European into Brazilian society – philosophy, technology, science, and even fashion. Elites in the capital transformed the center of Rio de Janeiro into a European city modeled after Paris, with wide boulevards, stylish cafés, chic shops, and electric trams, and other cities, especially São Paulo, soon followed suit.[42] Sevcenko identifies four guiding principles that directed the renewal of Rio de Janeiro:

> …the condemnation of the habits and customs connected by memory to the traditional society; the negations of any and all elements of popular culture that could sully the civilized image of the dominant society; a rigorous policy of expulsion of the popular classes from the central area of the city, which would be practically isolated for the exclusive enjoyment of the bourgeois; and an aggressive cosmopolitanism, profoundly identified with Parisian life.[43]

The new Brazil would be a Europe in the tropics, a forward-looking, modern nation that would take its rightful place among the powerful states of the world. In keeping with racial theories popular in Europe, Brazilian elites equated a modern, progressive nation with a racially European nation, one in which indigenous people and emancipated black slaves were an unpleasant reminder of a most decidedly primitive past. After the overthrow of the monarchy in

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[42] Nicolau Sevcenko, *Literatura como missão: tensões sociais e criação cultural na Primeira República*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985), 28-30.

[43] Ibid., 30.

1889, the Brazilian state was too weak to simply eliminate non-European cultures; instead, it could only seek to marginalize and control them, relegating them to the periphery of the cities and national life. Consequently, elites of the period did not complain so much at the presence of non-European and non-modern elements in the Brazilian nation; rather, they were more inclined to complain when those elements intruded upon the islands of European culture they had built in the major cities, when they forced themselves into the public view.[44] As long as elites did not have to see reminders of Brazil's "primitive" past, they could ignore it, relegating it to the periphery of society.

In this modern Brazil, European immigrants were to play a vital role in peopling the vast and under-populated Brazilian interior, and through miscegenation with black and indigenous Brazilians, their superior white genes would inevitably eventually overcome the weaker black and indigenous gene pool, creating a whiter and more European Brazil.[45] Immigrants from Syria and Lebanon intruded upon this vision of Brazil in several ways. First, there was the obvious problem that they were not European, coming instead from the exotic and barbarous Middle East. Yet since their physical appearance was certainly not black or Asian, and since almost all the early immigrants were Christians, their presence in Brazil could be at least tolerated and was not subject to the same heated debates and eventual restrictions as prospective Chinese immigration in the nineteenth century and Japanese immigration in the twentieth.[46] Second, Middle Eastern immigrants refused to settle in rural areas on small, family farms, thus violating the elite vision of appropriate work for immigrants. Third, by settling in major cities and working as peddlers, hawking produce on the streets, the Syrian-Lebanese made themselves highly visible in cities that were supposed to be becoming modern and advanced. Modern, European cities could not have exotic vendors from the Middle East selling fruits, vegetables,

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[44] Ibid., 34.

[45] Skidmore, 130. Skidmore quotes a 1914 pamphlet by Caio de Menezes that praised German immigration because Brazil needed "the influence of advanced peoples in building a race, especially at the historic moment when the percentage represented by the African race is beginning to decline and must disappear into the whirlwind of the white race…. The ethnic preponderance of the foreigner can only bring marvelous results for the formation of our race" (Caio de Menezes, *A raca allemã*, Porto Alegre: 1914, 61).

[46] Lesser maintains that similar physiognomy meant that Arabs only needed to change their names in order to become "instant Brazilians" (78-79). While a name change was undoubtedly the key to fitting into Brazilian society, it is worth emphasizing that other adjustments were necessary in addition to a name change. Immigrants would have to stop speaking Arabic, change their diet, change their occupation, and change their religious affiliation in order to be accepted by many Brazilians. Even many immigrants who did not go so far as to change their names attempted to blend in by changing one or more of these other features, especially language or religion. One interviewee stated that while his grandparents kept the Arabic surname Haddad, they refused to teach Arabic to their children and changed their religious rite from Maronite to Roman Catholic.

and dry goods in a heavy, foreign accent on their boulevards any more than they could tolerate Afro-Brazilians performing *capoeira* or indigenous Brazilians wearing feathers on those same boulevards. Ellis Jr., for example, in his description of the Rua 25 de Março neighborhood, depicted the area with exotic terms intended to indicate that the mystery and allure of the Middle East had come to dominate a corner of São Paulo. The men spoke a "very guttural and incomprehensible language" and looked like "living statues of Sargon profiled in granite in Babylonian gardens." The women had "black hair and large eyes." Everywhere, he saw

> Orthodox priests with long beards, stuck into their black cassocks, with very tall hats of a different and unusual style. The winged lions with human heads, Tiglath-Pileser or Nebuchadnezzar in the monuments imitated by Maspero, have immense similarities with these corpulent clergy who imitate the ranks of the bearded subjects of Balthazar.[47]

For Ellis Jr. and many other Brazilians of the first third of the twentieth century, Arab culture was something foreign, something decidedly out of place in the cosmpolitan and European city of São Paulo. As a result, the Syrians and Lebanese inspired distaste and occasionally outright hostility, even while their appearance and religion afforded them some level of tolerance. Gattaz describes Arab immigrants as being "different, but not too different" (*diferente mas não tanto*)[48], but it would be more accurate to state that they were "similar, but not too similar," since their physical and religious similarities with Brazilians were not enough to protect them from adverse reactions to their cultural differences.

Concentration of Arab culture in the urban loci of power

Further complicating the situation was the fact that Arab culture thrived in the major cities, particularly in São Paulo, to an extent impossible in the smaller cities of the interior. In the smaller cities of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and other states across Brazil, Syrian-Lebanese immigrants had little contact with their compatriots from the Middle East. There was no Maronite, Melkite, or Orthodox church, and there was no mosque, nor Syrian-Lebanese social clubs or charity organizations. Consequently, in smaller cities and rural areas, Arab immigrants did not often have the community resources to make a concerted effort to preserve their culture. In the cities, on the other hand, immigrants quickly came together to form churches, mosques, social clubs, and philanthropic organizations and to establish a vibrant Arabic-language press.

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[47] Ellis Jr., 198-199.

[48] Gattaz, 171.

Churches and mosques were usually established at the initiative of the immigrants already in Brazil, not at that of the religious hierarchies in the Middle East, and the various religious groups financed the establishment of their own houses of worship. The first Maronite priest arrived in Brazil in 1897, and Orthodox priests soon followed.[49] The Orthodox and Maronites both established parishes in São Paulo near the turn of the twentieth century, the Muslims built a mosque during the 1930s, and after their patriarch in the Middle East requested that the Vatican send priests to serve the Melkite diaspora, the Melkites organized a parish in Rio de Janeiro in 1940.[50] The churches often established their own philanthropic organizations in which the same wealthy families that had patronized the construction of the churches could support charity endeavors. These philanthropic organizations provided opportunities for the wealthiest families of the community to memorialize themselves and cement their position as the leaders of the colony. The earliest of these groups was the Sociedade Maronita de Beneficência, established in 1897.[51]

Another highly visible Syrian-Lebanese institution in the cities, particularly São Paulo, was the Arab-language press. Between 1890 and 1940, the colony produced at least 394 journals, magazines, and newspapers, most of which enjoyed a short life.[52] The first newspaper in Arabic appeared in São Paulo in 1895, and by 1914, there were fourteen Arabic-language newspapers, an output that surprised even the immigrants.[53] These publications initially focused on issues in the Middle East, such as the domination of Syria and Lebanon by the Turks, but over time, they began to turn their attention to events within the colony in Brazil.[54] Notwithstanding the impermanence of most of these publications, their sheer number and presence in major cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro could only serve to further elite concerns that the cities they had just worked so hard to Europeanize were being overrun by foreign cultures.

As their stores and other business enterprises became more and more prosperous, the most successful members of the colony became wealthy enough to afford the membership fees of exclusive country clubs but soon found that the "old money" Brazilian families who dominated

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49 Khatlab (2002), 65.

50 Roberto Khatlab, *Os melquitas* (São Paulo: Eparquia Greco-Melquita Católica do Brasil), 1993, 36.

51 Jorge Safady (1972), 140.

52 Oswaldo Truzzi, *De mascates a doutores: Sírios e libaneses em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Editora Sumaré, 1992), 45.

53 Lesser, 53.

54 Truzzi (1992), 44-45.

the clubs did not welcome them into their social circles. Snubbed by the Brazilian elite, Syrians and Lebanese opted to open their own social clubs, whose membership was normally formed along regional lines. The Esporte Clube Sírio was established in 1917, and when its Syrian members later objected to the addition of the word *libanês* in the title, Lebanese members of the community established the Clube Atlético Monte Líbano. Syrian immigrants also established Club Homs in 1921, named after the city of Homs in Syria, from which many of its founding members came.[55] Other smaller regional clubs included Clube Aleppo, Clube Hasbaya, Clube Marjeyoun, Club Rachaia, Sociedade Antioquina, and Zahlé Club, all of which not only served to preserve Arab culture in urban Brazil but also helped maintain national and regional rivalries within the colony.

In addition to congregating in their own churches, social clubs, and philanthropic organizations and maintaining their own newspapers, Middle Eastern immigrants also exhibited a marked tendency to marry within their own community. A 1927 report found that Syrian-Lebanese married within the colony 50.5% of the time, indicating that they had a lower "fusibility index" than Italians, Spaniards, and Portuguese.[56] Upper class Syrian-Lebanese were even more likely to marry within the colony, or even within their own family to first and second cousins.[57] While marriage with a member of another immigrant group or a native Brazilian was not uncommon, social pressure from parents and relatives often pushed young men and women toward endogamy.[58] As one daughter of immigrants put it, "The worst of all would have been for us to marry someone who was not of our same ancestry. This was the terror to be prevented at any cost!"[59] Women were much more likely to marry within the community. Truzzi notes that between 1940-1946, 27% of Syrian-Lebanese men married within the colony, while 65% of Syrian-Lebanese women did the same, indicating that the pressure toward endogamy was especially directed at women.[60]

The result of the proliferation of Syrian-Lebanese religious and social organizations and the tendency toward endogamy was the heightened persistence of the Arabic language and Middle Eastern culture in major cities, particularly São Paulo, and the placement of this non-

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55 Karam, 150, 160, 262.
56 Alfredo Ellis Jr., *Populações paulistas* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1934), 205.
57 Truzzi (1992), 32-37.
58 Greiber, Maluf, and Mattar, 224-225.
59 Samira Osman, "A imigração árabe no Brasil" *Travessia: revista do migrante* 12:35 (September 1999): 22.
60 Truzzi (1992), 31.

European and, hence, undesirable culture squarely within the gaze of Brazilian elites who were intent on making their cities more European in character. Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were supposed to become more like Paris, not more like Damascus. Elites reacted with alarm to the influx of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and focused on their dubious racial status, refusal to work in agriculture, and concentration in cities as particularly sinister characteristics. Lesser records that as early as 1898, inhabitants of the town of Rio Preto in the interior of the state of São Paulo complained that two-thirds of the town's commercial establishments were owned by Arabs, and an alderman later led a drive to ban the speaking of Arabic within hearing of a Brazilian. Others accused the Syrians and Lebanese of being prone to violence and opium trafficking, and police reports from 1897 reveal that *turcos* were the second-most represented immigrant group in São Paulo jails.[61] The commercial success of the Syrian-Lebanese colony in the following decades failed to win over all Brazilian elites and politicians, and in 1930, the Brazilian commercial attaché in Egypt complained that Middle Eastern immigrants were "populating Brazil and forming our race with all that is most repugnant in the universe."[62]

Frustrated with prejudice from Brazilians, many Syrian-Lebanese immigrants chose to change their names to sound more Brazilian, hoping that their adherence to Christianity and possession of similar facial features would allow them to blend in with the native population. Many other immigrants, however, chose to respond to attacks by arguing the merits of Middle Eastern culture and stressing their gratitude to their adopted homeland. Members of the colony with this attitude financed in 1922 the construction of a Monument to Syrian-Lebanese Friendship that they placed in Parque Dom Pedro II adjacent to downtown São Paulo. The fifty-foot monument portrays Syrian and Lebanese contributions to civilization on three sides and is topped by three figures – a female representing the Brazilian republic, an indigenous warrior, and a Syrian maiden, all joined together in fraternal harmony.[63] The intended message is that Syrians and Lebanese played a vital role in the creation of Western civilization and that these ancient and cultured people now form an essential part of the Brazilian nation. Although the monument was ostensibly intended to express the gratitude of the immigrants to Brazil as their adopted nation, the monument makes the clear implication that it is in fact Brazilians who are indebted to the

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61 Lesser, 51-52, 61. In 1933, Ellis Jr. also noted the supposed propensity to criminality among the Syrian-Lebanese, remarking, "The number of crimes and suicides in which the Syrians are protagonists is highly elevated. The press is daily filled with news of such events" (Ellis Jr., 209).

62 Lesser, 61.

63 Ibid., 55-58.

Syrian-Lebanese immigrants. Brazilian elites remained unconvinced, however, and their mistrust of Arabs in Brazil continued into the 1930s and 1940s.

Figures 3 and 4 – Monument to Syrian-Lebanese Friendship in São Paulo.

Fears of "immigrants cysts" and the Syrian-Lebanese response

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Syrian-Lebanese immigrants again fell under suspicion, not because they worked in commerce and lived in cities, but because of the nationalistic and xenophobic climate fostered by the Vargas dictatorship. Brazilian intellectuals and politicians publicly worried that some immigrant groups could not be effectively assimilated and would form "immigrant cysts," islands of foreign culture whose difference threatened the homogeneous Brazilian nation they envisioned.[64] The presence of foreign languages in public spaces was considered especially worrisome, and the government passed legislation requiring signs on businesses to be only in Portuguese, banning newspapers and magazines in foreign languages, and requiring that organizations with "foreign" names replace those names with more Brazilian ones. As a result, most Syrian-Lebanese social clubs and philanthropic organizations

[64] Ibid., 64.

temporarily dropped words like "Syrian" and "Lebanese" from their titles.[65] In 1941, a government official named R. Couto Ribeiro, following a visit to the German communities of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, worried that "the cultural isolation of the foreign nuclei represents a serious danger to national unity."[66] Ribeiro was horrified by entire German immigrant towns speaking nothing but German in churches, stores, and other public spaces and proposed that Brazil forbid the use of languages other than Portuguese in public, even in churches.[67]

> The Brazilian civilization is based on the spirit of sympathetic cooperation between all the bloodlines (*sangues*) that have contributed to its structure. Every Brazilian has the right to take pride in his or her ancestry and to maintain, within the home, the cult of family traditions. But also, above this freedom and this instinct toward ethnic preservation is the public interest, which obligates us to defend the ties of a common consciousness, a common language, and a common culture.[68]

In the *Estado Novo* of Getúlio Vargas, then, rural, agricultural immigrants had suddenly become a threat. Syrians and Lebanese were less isolated, since the majority of them lived in cities, but they still exhibited an overwhelming tendency to marry within their group and used Arabic in their church services and in other public spaces. This, combined with their visibility in the urban loci of state power, undoubtedly engendered mistrust similar to that directed toward Germans and other immigrant groups.[69]

Intellectuals in the colony were evidently concerned by such fears that they had not adjusted sufficiently to Brazilian culture, and their works from the 1930s and 1940s tend toward apologias for Syria, Lebanon, the colony, and Middle Eastern culture. While they insisted that Syrians and Lebanese had acculturated to life in Brazil and were loyal and grateful citizens, they refused to devalue Middle Eastern culture, instead often arguing that Brazilian and Middle Eastern culture had been connected for centuries, if not millennia, by the supposed presence of

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65 Karam, 261.

66 R. Ribeiro Couto, "Língua nacional e espírito nacional" *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* 2:2-3 (April 1941): 795.

67 Ibid., 794.

68 Ibid., 798.

69 One Syrian-Lebanese academic recently blamed a sinister global Zionist plot for elite mistrust of the Syrian-Lebanese, claiming that in order to create global sympathy for the creation of a Jewish state, the Zionists embarked on a concerted campaign to defame Arabs, particularly in North American film and literature. Thus, any negative representation of Arabs in North American or Brazilian cinema or literature occurs due to Zionist scheming, conveniently removing any fault from Brazilian society for negative stereotypes about Arabs. See Heliane Prudente Nunes, *A imigração árabe em Goiás, 1880-1970* (Doctoral Dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo, 1996), 211-213.

Phoenician seafarers in Brazil, the influence of Arab culture on Portugal, and the presence of Middle Eastern immigrants in early Brazilian colonial history. In so doing, they advanced the argument that Middle Eastern and Luso-Brazilian culture were not mutually exclusive, that they had mixed so much over the years that modern Middle Eastern immigrants in Brazil could retain aspects of their culture and still be considered legitimate, loyal Brazilians. In their attempt to prove that they were patriotic Brazilians, these intellectuals waxed eloquent in their praise of Brazil and the Brazilian people.

> Therefore, love for Brazil is not a virtue, but, in fact, a duty…. In the Brazilian, all races have the best example of generosity, goodness, and tolerance, chiefly those who search for a space to live in peace with their fellow men, as brothers and not with the reprehensible purpose of domination and enslavement.[70]

In addition, acutely aware of their non-European origins, they were insistent that not only were they loyal Brazilians, they were loyal and *white* Brazilians. Bastani said in 1944, "The Lebanese race is white. Due perhaps, however, to the climate or the heat of the sun, the brown-white-darkened (*pardo-branca-amorenada*) color predominates."[71] In a society that continued to prefer European immigrants, and in which whiteness was a key factor in determining social mobility, Syrian-Lebanese felt obligated to keep their distance both from Afro-Brazilians and from association with "exotic customs."[72] Their defense of the colony apparently had an effect, because by 1952, the *Revista de Imigração e Colonização*, the same journal that just a decade before had published Couto's attack on the persistence of foreign language and culture in public spaces, enthusiastically reproduced an article by Manuel Diegues that praised the Syrians and Lebanese for their "capacity for adaptation and acceptance of native cultural elements."[73] Diegues also used Syrian-Lebanese authors from the 1940s as sources for his article and lauded the colony's ability to blend its own culture with Brazilian culture without prejudice.[74]

During the Vargas dictatorship, even as they felt obligated to defend themselves against xenophobic sentiments, the Syrian-Lebanese also took advantage of government policies that were friendly to business and industry. Karam observed that Syrian-Lebanese only began intensive involvement in many small-scale industries like rayon weaving during the Vargas

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70 Duoun, 140.
71 Bastani, 123.
72 Truzzi (1997a), 16.
73 Manuel Diegues, "Dois grupos étnicos-culturais no Brasil: italianos e sírio-libaneses" *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* 13:2 (2nd semester 1952): 137.
74 Ibid., 135, 137.

regime, when in order to build support among the urban middle class, Vargas crafted policies to favor small business and light industry.[75] The rapid social ascent of the Syrian-Lebanese community, then, was closely connected to an industrializing Brazil in which the government came to view the commercial and industrial pursuits of small businessmen like the Syrian-Lebanese as vital to building an industrial, modern Brazil.

Entry into the professional fields and politics

The 1930s and 1940s also saw the rise of two trends that would define social mobility among the colony for the next several decades – the entry of Syrians and Lebanese into the professional ranks of doctors, lawyers, and engineers, and their first forays into politics. Due to the pervasive presence of Protestant missionary schools in Syria and Lebanon during the nineteenth century, most Syrian-Lebanese immigrants arrived in Brazil with a deep respect for education, and many families sacrificed greatly to send their children, both boys and girls, to Roman Catholic and Protestant private schools. Until the 1930s, students from the colony who pursued post-secondary education tended to study business, commerce, or accounting, courses of study that would better equip them to manage their stores and small factories. Only a few students entered professional fields like medicine, law, or engineering. Beginning in the 1930s, however, the elite of the colony, observing the propensity of wealthy Brazilian youth to seek training in these areas, began to send their sons to medical, law, and, to a lesser extent, engineering schools.[76] Although the absolute number of Syrians and Lebanese in these schools was never high, Arab students entered professional schools at a rate nearly equal to Italians and Portuguese, both of whom had immigrated to Brazil in far larger numbers. The elite of the colony also sent their daughters to universities, yet after graduation, families nearly always pressured women to marry within the colony and adopt the role of wife and mother. Parents considered it beneficial for their daughters to study, but only with the objective of becoming educated, not with the goal of actually practicing a career. As a result, although quite a few Syrian-Lebanese women graduated from universities, the vast majority of them never practiced a profession.[77] Members of the community would later blame Arab culture for this lack of professional opportunities for women. "For my parents, and for all the Arabs who lived around

[75] Karam, 69.
[76] Knowlton, 245-246, 257-258.
[77] Truzzi (1992), 82-83, 92-93.

us, it was an absurdity for a women to work outside [the home], since she had her father and husband to support her."[78]

Starting in the late 1940s, Syrian-Lebanese professionals began to consider entering the political sphere. Prior to World War II, members of the colony had never become deeply involved in politics. After the war, however, several factors converged that led to a sharp rise in political involvement among the Syrian-Lebanese. First, the new politicians largely came from the second generation of Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil, and their interests were tied much more to Brazil than to a distant land that most of them had never seen. Second, since the political ranks of Brazil were already filled with lawyers and other professionals, it was to be expected that new Syrian-Lebanese professionals would also consider entering politics. Third, the re-democratization of Brazil following the forced retirement of Vargas in 1945 created increased political opportunities, and the late 1940s were an opportune time for hopeful politicians to seek public office.[79] Members of the colony began to run for positions in the state and federal legislatures, and the number of descendants of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants in the federal congress grew steadily, with five federal deputies elected in 1946 and 1950, fourteen in 1954, twenty in 1958, and thirty-three in 1962.[80] The number actually dropped briefly during the military dictatorship, only to grow even more quickly than before with the opening of the 1970s and the re-establishment of democracy in the 1980s.[81] In 1994, fifty delegates of Syrian-Lebanese descent were elected to the federal congress, winning nearly 10% of the total seats.[82] This level of representation was out of all proportion the number of descendants of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants in Brazil and illustrated the ascendancy of the colony and its political power. Members of the colony tended to support Syrian-Lebanese candidates, but their support alone could never provide enough votes for an electoral victory. As a result, Syrian-Lebanese

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78 Osman, 19.

79 Oswaldo Truzzi, *Patrícios: Sírios e libaneses em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Editorial Husitec, 1997), 150. (Referred to henceforward as Truzzi, 1997b.) Truzzi also notes that when independence came to Lebanon and Syria, in 1943 and 1946, respectively, the primary political issue from the Middle East that attracted the attention of the colony was resolved, allowing the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil to focus their attention more on Brazilian politics.

80 Sergio Tadeu de Niemeyer Lamarão, "Identidade étnica e representação política: sírios e libaneses no Parlamento brasileiro, 1946-1998," in *Guerras e imigrações*, org. Marco Aurélio Machado de Oliveira (Campo Grande, Brazil: Universidade Federal de Matto Grosso do Sul, 2004), 183.

81 The reason for this drop in representation during the dictatorship is not clear. It would be interesting to see if the number of deputies from other immigrant groups also dropped during this period. If so, it could indicate a preference in the military government for candidates with a more traditionally "Brazilian" lineage.

82 Lamarão, 183.

candidates had to be able to appeal to a broad range of voters, not simply to members of their own colony.

The escapades of some Syrian-Lebanese politicians, however, served to reinforce negative stereotypes about the colony in Brazilian society at large. The first member of the colony to be elected to the federal congress was José João Abdalla, in 1946. He repeatedly stated that he refused to pay taxes "on principle," and his shady business dealings landed him in prison twice in subsequent years. One member of the colony later expressed the opinion that Abdalla was not a politician at all – he simply needed to be elected in order to win immunity from prosecution.[83] Another important figure, both in Brazilian politics and in the perpetuation of stereotypes about Arab Brazilians, was Paulo Maluf, who held various appointed posts, served as mayor of the city of São Paulo and governor of the state, and unsuccessfully ran for president as the military party's candidate in the partially open election of 1985. Maluf was constantly accused of personalism, cronyism, misuse of funds, and any number of other corrupt dealings. In spite of his frequent troubles and reputation for crookedness, Maluf was rumored in 2006 to be mulling another run for governor of the state of São Paulo. Finally, as Karam relates in his dissertation, Arab Brazilian councilmen and councilwomen were at the center of a corruption scandal in the city of São Paulo in 2000, and press reports of the scandal frequently brought up the Arab ethnicity of many of the accused politicians.[84] As each of these Syrian-Lebanese politicians fell under suspicion for shady business dealings and corruption, they reinforced long-standing Brazilian stereotypes of Arabs as shrewd and dishonest businessmen who possessed an innate ability to work the system to their advantage and use their cleverness to deceive less crafty Brazilians.

This shift toward professional fields and politics did not mean that Syrians and Lebanese necessarily abandoned their commercial roots. In many families, one or more sons would forego professional education, instead opting to allow their father to groom them to eventually take over the family store or factory. Other families may not have been able to afford higher education or may not have seen the need for it, viewing commerce as a more economically secure profession. However, the entry of many members of the community into the professional world did have important repercussions. In families in which all children became doctors, lawyers, or engineers,

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[83] Truzzi (1997b), 152-153.

[84] Karam, 150-158.

when the father was ready to retire, he often found that none of his children were willing to abandon their careers to keep the family business operating. Many families thus closed their stores in traditional Arab commercial districts like Rua 25 de Março in São Paulo or the Saara in Rio de Janeiro. Frequently, however, they would retain title to the building and rent the space out to new immigrants from other countries, first Chinese and later Koreans, who would operate shops in the buildings and pay rent to their Arab landlords. This trend continues until today, when Arab landlords still own a large chunk of the real estate around Rua 25 de Março, yet most of the stores have Chinese, Korean, or Brazilian proprietors and employees. In an interesting reversal, an influx of street vendors into the area has left Syrian-Lebanese landlords and businessmen around Rua 25 de Março complaining that the respectable commercial tradition of their neighborhood is being compromised by unlicensed vendors selling inferior merchandise.[85] Their complaints sound not so different from those voiced by non-Arab proprietors when Arabs first began to open stores in the area nearly a century before.

Immigration after World War II

After World War II, as the more established immigrants entered the professional ranks and launched political careers, a new generation of immigrants from the Middle East arrived in Brazil. During the war, immigration had ground to almost a complete halt, with only ten Syrian, Lebanese, or Turkish immigrants registered at the port of Santos between 1941-1945. In 1946, 36 immigrants arrived via Santos, and by 1948, the number had risen to 679, of whom 504, or 74.2%, were Lebanese. By 1952, that number had risen further to 2,228, of whom 2,133, or 95.7%, were Lebanese.[86] Statistics after 1952 that list immigration from Syria and Lebanon specifically to Brazil are not available, but Gattaz cites Lebanese authors who estimate 3,000 emigrants leaving Lebanon per year during the 1950s and 8,500 per year during the 1960s. During the 1960s, a high percentage of the emigrants moved to the Arab countries around the Persian Gulf, attracted by the high salaries offered by booming oil economies. Two major demographic shifts distinguish immigrants arriving between 1945-1970 from those who arrived before World War II. First, the percentage of immigrants coming from Syria diminished, with the majority of new immigrants coming instead from Lebanon. Second, in sharp contrast to

[85] Karam, 91.

[86] Statistics for Syrian-Lebanese immigration from 1941-1952 are from the *Boletim do Departamento de Imigração e Colonização*, no. 4, December 1941; no. 5, December 1950; and no. 7, December 1952.

immigration before World War II, the majority of new immigrants were Muslims, both Sunni and Shiite. After independence from France in 1943, Lebanon created a unique form of government with proportional representation based on religious affiliation. However, Muslims felt that the power-sharing agreement unfairly granted too much influence to Maronites, and many Muslim immigrants who arrived in Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s mention discrimination by Christians as an important motivating factor in their emigration from Lebanon.[87] In addition, the same economic problems that had afflicted Lebanon during the pre-World War II migratory movement continued, including rapid population growth and accompanying pressure on agricultural production.

Starting in the 1970s, the nature of the migratory movement changed again, as Lebanese began emigrating in large numbers due to the civil war and conflicts with Israel and Syria. From the 1970s through the early 1990s, overall emigration from Lebanon increased again, to 10,000 per year during the 1970s, and 57,000 per year throughout the 1980s. Altogether, nearly a third of the population of Lebanon emigrated between 1970-1990. This increase was due, of course, to the effects of the Lebanese civil war and simultaneous conflicts involving Israel and Syria. Armed conflict, terrorism, destruction of infrastructure, and decreased educational and economic opportunities as a result of the war all encouraged emigration. Although it is impossible to ascertain how many of these new immigrants chose Brazil as opposed to the United States or other countries, some immigrants, particularly Christians, already had relatives in Brazil, and others chose Brazil because of the known success of previous Syrian and Lebanese immigrants there. Brazil also had a reputation as a country with a permissive immigration policy, and Brazilian naturalization was relatively easy to obtain. Since the immigrants who left Lebanon specifically because of the armed conflict were refugees, they generally intended to return home after the war ended, and once peace was restored in 1990, that is precisely what most of them did. Immigrants who came primarily due to the economic havoc wreaked by the war, on the other hand, tended to stay in Brazil, since economic opportunities there were so much greater than at home. Gattaz notes that the major exception to this trend toward remaining in Brazil are Shiites from southern Lebanon who settled in Foz de Iguaçu on the border with Paraguay and Argentina. A great many of them returned home once Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon.[88]

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87 Gattaz, 138-143.

88 Ibid., 138-151.

New immigrants after World War II evidenced the same overwhelming preference for commerce as the previous immigrants from Syria and Lebanon. Many more recent immigrants, including some who arrived as late as the 1980s and 1990s, related carrying items like towels and hand cloths in backpacks and peddling them in the working class neighborhoods and *favelas* of São Paulo.[89] Just as with previous immigrants, new immigrants preferred not to remain peddlers and often sought to open their own stores and businesses. Arabs in Foz de Iguaçu, for example, became known for their extensive involvement in electronics retail. During the armed conflict in Lebanon, members of the upper class and professionals were also displaced, and Brazil saw a modest influx of educated, professional Lebanese immigrants. As a result, while peddling and commerce remained very common, there was probably more diversity of professions among the new immigrants than among the immigrants of the first two periods.

Contemporary stereotypes and identity

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony looked back with pride on 125 years of upward social mobility. From their humble beginnings as peddlers, they had risen to become store owners and small-scale industrialists. The second generation added to their parents' success by entering the professional ranks and becoming accomplished doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, and politicians. They had created churches, mosques, respected charity organizations, posh country clubs, and powerful commercial and trade organizations. A wave of new immigrants continued the commercial tradition of the colony, and descendants of the original immigrants continued to work in commerce and light industry. Among all the immigrant groups who came to Brazil, Syrians and Lebanese had perhaps the most dramatic success story, and even as they actively preserved aspects of their Middle Eastern heritage, they professed pride at calling themselves Brazilians. In response to the attacks of elite Brazilians, they initially created what Lesser called a hyphenated identity, seeking to validate Arab culture while professing their assimilation to Brazilian culture. As Karam observed at the turn of the twenty-first century, decades later, after the substitution of representative democracy for military dictatorship and subsequent neoliberal market reforms, Arab Brazilian identity intensified in a national climate in which multiculturalism and ethnicity were suddenly in vogue.

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[89] Ibid., 183.

Today Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil continue to face stereotypes, both positive and negative. Lacking altogether is the terrorist stereotype of Arabs that has emerged in the United States and Europe in the last quarter of a century. Instead, Brazilians recognize Arabs for their supposedly innate business acumen, their concentration in commercial and professional fields, their unique and suddenly popular cuisine, and such cultural art forms as the belly dance. The *turco* designation continues, and although most Syrian-Lebanese feel it is inaccurate, it generally seems to have lost its discriminatory connotations for many members of the colony, at least when it is spoken jestingly by friends.[90] Arabs also continue to suffer from a reputation for shady business practices and political corruption, and the Rua 25 de Março neighborhood maintains a reputation for tax evasion and specialization in selling contraband items, even as the Arab shop owners have largely been replaced by Chinese and Korean immigrants. As Karam points out, Arab Brazilians themselves are also actively involved in the maintenance of certain markers of ethnicity. I saw this in action when I attended a "Festival of Immigrants" at the Memorial do Imigrante museum in São Paulo in June 2006. Japanese, Bolivians, Italians, and Syrian-Lebanese all performed traditional dances. The most picture-taking and admiration from the audience, however, came for the Syrian-Lebanese dancers. Unlike the other immigrant groups, who crowded the stage with male and female dancers and musicians, the Syrian-Lebanese featured only two dancers, both scantily-clad women performing the belly dance, oscillating to the seductive music, much to the delight of male visitors. Out of all the cultural art forms they could have chosen to represent their culture, the Syrian-Lebanese chose the belly dance, popularized in the last few years by a Brazilian soap opera, in this way showing their own assimilation of Brazilian stereotypes about Arab culture. The Memorial do Imigrante also contains an exhibit designed to show the various immigrant communities that have settled in Brazil in their native dress from their home countries. In a marked contrast from earlier years in which assimilationist rhetoric predominated, today's discourse glorifies cultural diversity. Interestingly, the figures representing traditional Syrian-Lebanese dress display the immigrants in the attire of Muslim desert nomads and not as the Christian farmers that most of them in fact were, illustrating the continued persistence of stereotypes about the exotic Middle East with its nomads and mysterious, veiled women.

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[90] Such banter using racially loaded terms, while taboo in the United States, is common in Brazil. I frequently observed white Brazilians refer to their Afro-Brazilian friends as *negão* or *preto*, and the term *japa* is similarly commonly applied to descendants of Japanese immigrants.

Figure 5 – Belly dancers showcasing Syrian-Lebanese culture at the Memorial do Imigrante in São Paulo.

Figure 6 – Traditional Syrian-Lebanese attire as conceptualized by the Memorial do Imigrante.

Historiography

The literature investigating the Syrian-Lebanese community in Brazil falls into three broad categories. The first is made up of intellectuals in the Syrian-Lebanese community who wrote their own biographies, histories of Syria or Lebanon, histories of the migratory movement, or discussions of the role of the community in Brazilian society. The second category consists of Brazilian scholars, most often historians, who study the history of the migratory movement and the social mobility of the immigrants, usually in a particular Brazilian state. Several Brazilian scholars are themselves of Syrian-Lebanese descent, and several of them study many of the same topics discussed by Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals. The third, and smallest, category consists of foreign scholars, usually Americans, who have conducted historical, sociological, or ethnographic research concerning the Syrian-Lebanese community.

Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals

Within a few decades of their arrival in Brazil, once the colony had established itself financially and its most successful members had begun to attempt to insert themselves into the Brazilian elite, members of the Syrian-Lebanese community started to write autobiographies and histories of the migratory movement from the Middle East to Brazil. Not coincidentally, these accounts began to appear during the 1930s and 1940s, when the nationalism of the Vargas regime cast heightened suspicion upon foreign immigrants, particularly those that did not seem to be assimilating quickly enough into Brazilian society. As a result, these authors betray a preoccupation with linking Syria and Lebanon to Brazil, both historically and culturally, and with demonstrating that Syrian-Lebanese immigrants have adequately integrated themselves into the nation. At the same time, they glorify Syrian and Lebanese culture and emphasize the myriad contributions that they claim Syria and Lebanon have made to human civilization and the Brazilian nation.[91]

Three of the earliest Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals to defend the community were Taufik Kurban, Taufik Duoun, and Jamil Safady between 1933 and 1950. Kurban authored a volume paying homage to the important families of the colony and another describing the history of

[91] In addition to glorifying their Syrian-Lebanese origins and attempting to prove the extent of their assimilation, these authors also often pay homage to the elite of the colony by writing biographies of their families and lauding their commercial and charitable accomplishments. See Truzzi (1992), 41-42.

Syrian-Lebanese immigrants in Brazil.[92] Duoun wrote his book, *A emigração sírio-libanesa às terras de promissão*, at the request of elite Syrian-Lebanese families. He effusively praises the generosity of Brazilians nation in welcoming Syrian-Lebanese immigrants to their nation and assures his readers of the undying devotion of the colony to their adopted nation. In an effort to present the colony as a united bloc, despite regional and religious differences, he plays down differences between Christians and Muslims, praising Mohammed at length as a visionary and a prophet, in spite of his own Christian upbringing.[93] Jamil Safady, a first generation immigrant from Lebanon, created the Department of Arab Studies at the Universidade de São Paulo during his time there as a doctoral student in history in the mid-1940s. Like most other Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals of the era, he insisted that the community was assimilating itself "normally" and praised their background as peddlers.[94] He died suddenly in 1950, with only one of his works published, and it was left to his brother Jorge to publish the remainder of his works in the early 1970s.

Bastani, already briefly discussed earlier, focused his work exclusively on the Lebanese in Brazil, ignoring Syrians altogether and claiming that the Lebanese were, in fact, Phoenicians and not Arabs at all. As mentioned previously, he attempts to create a link between Brazil and Lebanon by placing Phoenician traders in Brazil nearly 1,000 years B.C.E. and by ascribing a Lebanese origin to a number of staples of Brazilian culture, like *churrasco*. Fanciful though his work may have been, Brazilian authors who studied the community would later cite Bastani to prove how well-integrated Syrians and Lebanese were with Brazilian society.

For the purposes of this thesis, perhaps the best and most important of these works by Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals is Wadih Safady's *Cenas e cenários dos caminhos da minha vida*. Although his primary purpose was to write an autobiography, Safady made valuable observations about the conflicts within the community. More importantly, he discussed the various Syrian-Lebanese sects in depth, especially his own church, the Orthodox Church, providing detailed information about the names of bishops, priests, and charitable societies.

This tendency of the colony to produce intellectuals that explained Syrian-Lebanese culture to the Brazilian nation continued throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-

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92 Taufik Kurban, *Ensaios e biographias* (São Paulo: Sociedade Impressora Paulista, 1933) and *Os syrios e libaneses no Brasil* (São Paulo: Sociedade Impressora Paulista, 1933).

93 Duoun, 140.

94 Jamil Safady, *Panorama da imigração árabe*, 17.

first. One of the most widely-known was Jorge Safady, who submitted a doctoral dissertation on Arab immigration to Brazil to the Universidade de São Paulo in 1972. The dissertation is a rambling study that is valuable primarily for its extensive lists of Syrian-Lebanese social and religious organizations. Safady was greatly concerned with presenting the Syrian-Lebanese colony as a united body of Arabs, and in order to achieve his goal, he glossed over or entirely ignored regional, religious, and social divides within the colony, going so far as to claim that Christians and Muslims alike emigrated due to Turkish attacks on Arab culture and that the differences between Christianity and Islam are at most insignificant and superficial.

The most recent and important intellectual to come from the Syrian-Lebanese colony is Roberto Khatlab, a Brazilian of Lebanese descent who immigrated back to Lebanon. A Melkite Catholic, he has written prolifically about the Eastern Christian churches and their presence in Brazil. He has also written a treatise on relations between Brazil and Lebanon and in 2005 published the first complete annotated bibliography of the works written to date about the Syrian-Lebanese community in Brazil.

Brazilian scholars

Although historically the career path of choice for university students of Syrian-Lebanese descent was either law, medicine, or engineering, a few chose to study the history of their colony, and from the 1980s onward, numerous theses and dissertations by Syrian-Lebanese scholars appeared. Most relied heavily on oral interviews and statistical data and, in keeping with a worldwide historiographic trend toward regional and local history, tended to focus on the Syrian-Lebanese presence in a particular Brazilian state or city. Between the early 1980s and the beginning of the twenty-first century, a wealth of studies appeared that chronicled the history of the community in Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais; Piaui; Espírito Santo; the interior of the state of São Paulo; the city of São Paulo; Rio Grande do Sul; Mato Grosso do Sul; Pará; and Goiás.[95]

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[95] For Juiz de Fora, see Wilson de Lima Bastos, *Os sírios em Juiz de Fora* (Juiz de Fora, Brazil: Editora Paraibuna, 1988). For Piauí, see Moyses Castello Branco, *Historia do comércio de Teresina: (participação de sírios e libaneses*) (Teresina, Brazil: Editora Academia Piauiense de Letras, 1982). For Espírito Santo, see Mintaha Alcuri Campos, *Turco pobre, sírio remediado, libanês rico: a trajetoria do imigrante libanês no Espirito Santo* (Vitória, Brazil: Instituto Jones dos Santos Neves, 1987). For the interior of São Paulo, see Ana Maria Gomes, *Os libaneses em Cajuru* (Doctoral Dissertation, Centro Universitário Barão de Mauá, 2004). For the city of São Paulo, see Oswaldo Truzzi, *De mascates a doutores: Sírios e libaneses em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Editora Sumaré, 1992) and *Patrícios: Sírios e libaneses em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Editorial Husitec, 1997). For Rio Grande do Sul, see Cecília Kemel, *Sírios e libaneses: aspectos da comunidade árabe no sul do Brasil* (Santa Cruz do Sul, Brazil: Editora

Taken collectively, these theses and dissertations reinforce the traditional image of the Syrian-Lebanese community as peddlers turned proprietors turned professionals and show that the social trajectory of the immigrants was similar throughout all of Brazil. Although they are valuable for noting regional peculiarities of local immigrant communities, many of them rely heavily on Duoun, Kurban, and the American sociologist Clark Knowlton and fail to engage in detailed analysis of self identification or religion. Furthermore, reflecting regional divisions within the colony, many of them focus only on immigrants from Syria or Lebanon. Others advance a pan-Arab agenda reminiscent of the earlier work of Jorge Safady.

The exception to this pattern is the work of Oswaldo Truzzi, the most important and prolific of these regionally-oriented scholars, who focuses on the Syrian-Lebanese colony in the city of São Paulo. Truzzi emphasizes the upward social mobility of the immigrants and was the first scholar to record in detail the entry of the colony into the professional and political ranks. Unlike the vast majority of Brazilian historians to study the colony, who were themselves descendants of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and often downplayed divisions within the colony, Truzzi details the many regional, religious, and social rivalries that exist within the community, and he discusses the importance of regional and religious identities in the evolution of the colony in Brazil. He has published works in Portuguese, English, Spanish, and French, with the two most important being *De mascates a doutores: sírios e libaneses em São Paulo* and *Patrícios: sírios e libaneses em São Paulo*, which builds upon the research from the former book and adds information about the entrance of the colony into politics, along with a comparison of the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil with the Syrian-Lebanese in the United States.

One of the most recent and thorough new Brazilian scholars to research the Syrian-Lebanese is Andre Gattaz, who completed a doctoral dissertation at the Universidade de São Paulo in 2001 entitled *A imigração libanesa ao Brasil: historia oral*. The dissertation consists largely of materials gleaned from a number of interviews with first, second, and third generation members of the community. Although Gattaz digresses into a lengthy and politicized discussion of the Lebanese civil war and conflict with Israel, he contributes by focusing on recent immigration to Brazil, particularly immigration by Muslims. He conducted a number of his

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UNISC, 2000). For Mato Grosso do Sul, see Marco Aurélio Machado de Oliveira, *Os mais importante é a raça: sírios e libaneses na política em Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul* (Doctoral Dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo, 2001). For Pará, see Assad Zaidan, *Raizes libaneses no Pará* (Belém, Brazil: Governo do Pará, Secretaria Especial de Promoção Social, 2001). For Goiás, see Heliante Prudente Nunes, *A imigração árabe em Goiás* (Goiânia, Brazil: Editora da Universidade Federal de Goiás, 2000).

interviews among the important and overwhelmingly Muslim Lebanese community in Foz de Iguaçu, on the Paraguayan border.

Foreign scholars

Finally, a very few non-Brazilian scholars have contributed to the literature on the Arab Brazilian community. Despite their limited numbers, however, these foreign authors have often proven to be on the cutting edge of scholarship, and their work has been influential among Brazilian scholars researching the Syrian-Lebanese community. The earliest and most influential foreign scholar was Clark Knowlton, a Vanderbilt University sociology graduate student who conducted research on the Syrian-Lebanese community in São Paulo in 1950. His dissertation, completed in 1955, was published in Portuguese in 1960 as *Sírios e Libaneses: mobilidade social e espacial*, and Brazilian and foreign scholars alike have relied heavily upon it in the nearly five decades since. Most Brazilian authors cite it as the single most important study conducted among the Syrian-Lebanese colony, with some authors virtually copying entire sections from it. Knowlton focuses on the "demographic, ecological, and social mobility aspects of colony life" and fills his dissertation with charts and graphs, interview data and statistical analysis.[96] Although many of the theoretical assumptions that underpin it are obsolete today, Knowlton's work remains by far the most complete and detailed statistical analysis of the community.

In the 1990s, historian Jeffrey Lesser examined several non-European immigrant groups in Brazil, including the Jews, Japanese, and Syrian-Lebanese. In his meticulously researched chapter on the Syrian-Lebanese in his landmark book *Negotiating National Identity*, Lesser argues that the colony responded to attacks from elite Brazilians not by attempting to assimilate more thoroughly into Brazilian society, but by creating a hyphenated identity, in which they acknowledged both their Arabness and their Brazilianness. This could occur either by attempting to manipulate history to more closely associate Syria and Lebanon with Brazil and by arguing that Syrians and Lebanese were white, and thus desirable immigrants, or it could happen by arguing that Middle Eastern culture was different from and yet equal to European culture.[97] Lesser pays special attention to the negative views taken regarding Arab immigration in the Brazilian press, by government officials, and by intellectuals.

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[96] Knowlton, 3.

[97] Lesser, 78.

The most recent scholar from the United States to study the colony is anthropologist John Tofik Karam, who wrote a doctoral dissertation in 2004 entitled *Distinguishing Arabesques: The Politics and Pleasures of Being Arab in Neoliberal Brazil*. Karam makes identity the cornerstone of his dissertation, arguing that since the 1990s, neoliberal Brazil has intensified Arab Brazilian identity through such diverse channels as political scandals involving Arab Brazilian politicians, soap operas featuring Arab belly dancers, Arab fast food chains, and ethnic tourism to Syria and Lebanon. Unlike in the past, when Brazil saw Arab culture as something to be absorbed by Brazilian society through assimilation, the more multi-cultural and diverse climate of neoliberal Brazil allowed Arab culture to be exhibited in a more positive light in which ethnic heritage was something to be celebrated rather than assimilated. Consequently, Arab Brazilian identity in has been intensified and also specified to Brazil, as Arab Brazilians have adopted Brazilian cultural values such as racial democracy, insisting that they do not experience discrimination in Brazil and expressing unease at the tense political and ethnic situation in the Middle East. Both Lesser and Karam contributed greatly to the literature about the Syrian-Lebanese community, and new research for the next several decades will no doubt have to address their assertions about Syrian-Lebanese identity in Brazil.

Despite the volume of work to appear about Arab Brazilians in the last twenty-five years, several major gaps still exist in the research. Many Brazilian historians have focused their research almost exclusively upon oral interviews and have yet to fully exploit abundant archival materials.[98] A great many rely heavily upon the 1961 Portuguese translation of Knowlton's dissertation, along with Syrian-Lebanese chroniclers like Duoun, Kurban, and Bastani, whose academic value is questionable at best. The vast majority of scholars have simply documented causes of immigration, the upward social trajectory of the immigrant community in Brazil, and the supposedly high level of acculturation to Brazilian society among the Syrian-Lebanese. With the exceptions of Truzzi, Lesser, and Karam, relatively few have engaged in detailed analysis of ethnic identity and the assimilation of Brazilian concepts of race and class by Arab Brazilian immigrants and their descendants. While most scholars at least mention religion, and a few devote a few pages or a chapter to the topic, none focus on the topic or explore the intersection between religion and ethnic identity. The recent works by Lesser, Karam, and Truzzi opened

[98] Since many of the original immigrants and their children are still alive, oral history is certainly a valuable method of gaining information about the colony. However, many authors utilize interviews almost exclusively and largely ignore church records, Arabic-language newspapers, and other primary sources.

refreshing new avenues in the study of the Syrian-Lebanese community, and this thesis attempts to supplement their work.

Religion in the Syrian-Lebanese Colony

This section of the thesis will analyze the largely neglected aspect of the religious life of the Syrian-Lebanese colony. I will first discuss the history and current status of each of the major religious groups present among the Syrian-Lebanese in São Paulo, utilizing interviews, church records, and secondary sources, with an emphasis on the three largest Christian groups – Orthodox, Melkite, and Maronite. I will summarize the changes each religious group has made as it has confronted Brazilian culture and the ways in which the role of the churches in the colony have changed over the years. I will also explain how each group today is involved in the maintenance and recreation of identity in the Syrian-Lebanese community. In addition, I will briefly look at the inroads two other religious traditions – evangelical Protestantism and *umbanda* – have attempted to make into the colony. Finally, I will synthesize the information gathered about each group to trace a general trajectory of the experience of religious groups in the Syrian-Lebanese community as a whole, identifying common trends and attempting to explain how and why the role of religion has changed in the colony over the last century.

General observations

Most of the Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to Brazil were Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, or Maronite Catholic, and few belonged to the Western rite of the Catholic Church. But when the earliest immigrants arrived in Brazil and spread across the country as peddlers and shop owners, they discovered that usually the only church available was the local Roman Catholic parish. This presented fewer difficulties for Melkites and Maronites since they were already Catholics who simply used a different rite, and the only adjustment necessary was becoming accustomed to the traditions of the Western rite. For Orthodox, on the other hand, going to a Roman Catholic church comprised not only a change of rite, but also a change of religious affiliation. As a result, it is no surprise that the Orthodox were the first Syrian-Lebanese religious group to begin establishing parishes in Brazil, with churches scattered across the country before the Maronites or Melkites had built their first church. Knowlton observed in 1956 that most of the few Muslims in the colony, due to the lack of mosques, had resigned

themselves to raising their children in Catholic churches, reasoning that a different religion for their children was better than no religion at all.[99]

Even after the Orthodox, Maronites, Melkites, and other Syrian-Lebanese religious groups had all established themselves in Brazil, due to a variety of factors, many in the community continued to attend Roman Catholic churches. Syrians and Lebanese who changed their names to seem more Brazilian also frequently also changed their church, reasoning that going to a Roman Catholic church would help them fit in better and, by extension, would be good for their business. Many Syrians and Lebanese remained in rural areas where their own church had no parishes, and many in major cities also chose to attend Roman Catholic churches simply because those churches were closer to their homes. The latter often continued to visit the Syrian-Lebanese churches for the baptisms, weddings, and funerals of relatives and friends, or on major holidays like Christmas and Easter. One interviewee stated that his Maronite grandparents began attending Western rite Catholic churches upon their arrival in Brazil and raised all their children in the Western rite; consequently, religion helped decrease their ethnic identity and helped them assimilate more quickly to Brazilian culture. This trend continues today, not only in the Maronite and Melkite churches, but also among the Orthodox. Although no statistics exist, it is entirely possible that today there are more descendants of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in the Western rite Catholic church than in traditionally Arab churches like the Orthodox, Melkites, and Maronites.

The practice of joining the Roman Catholic Church to facilitate assimilation to Brazilian culture contributed to a major disparity between the number of Orthodox, Melkite, and Maronite churches in Brazil in comparison to the United States. As mentioned above, in Brazil, due to their similar physical appearance, Arabs could assimilate by changing their surname, language, or religion. As a result, many were absorbed into the Roman Catholic Church, and despite immigrating to Brazil and the United States in nearly equal numbers, the Syrian-Lebanese founded relatively few Orthodox, Melkite, and Maronite parishes in Brazil. In the United States, on the other hand, changing their name, language, or religion would not enable Arabs to look like Americans or instantly integrate into a northern European, Protestant culture. In addition, the Catholic Church did not have the pervasive influence in the United States that it had in Brazil, and a conversion to Catholicism was not required in order to garner social or economic

[99] Knowlton, 292.

advantages. Today, there are sixteen Antiochian Orthodox parishes in the archdiocese of São Paulo (with a few other parishes in Rio de Janeiro that the patriarchate in Damascus administers directly), while there are 217 in the United States. [100] The Melkites have six parishes in Brazil and forty-two in the United States, and the Maronites have seven parishes in Brazil and seventy-nine in the United States.[101]

This common tendency to join the Roman Catholic Church to facilitate assimilation or due to a more convenient location is but one aspect of a major religious characteristic of the Christians in the Syrian-Lebanese community – a general disregard for the sectarian distinctions that are such an important part of life in Syria and Lebanon. Interviews conducted with members of the colony over the last fifty years very commonly make mention of this. It is not uncommon for families to attend a Catholic church because it is closer to their home, the Orthodox cathedral for important holidays, and the Orthodox, Melkite, Maronite, and other churches for the baptisms, weddings, and funerals of relatives and friends, often receiving communion in all of the churches. Of course there are some prominent families in the colony that traditionally associate themselves with just one church, but for the majority of the immigrants, sectarian distinctions appear to be inconsequential, a trend that increases with each generation.

The Orthodox Church

The Antiochian Orthodox Church is headquartered in Damascus, where it is led by a patriarch who, along with the patriarchs of Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Alexandria, is one of the top-ranking Eastern Orthodox prelates. In contemporary Brazil, the Orthodox make up perhaps the most publicly visible Syrian-Lebanese denomination. Composed of mostly descendants of Syrian immigrants, with a substantial Lebanese minority, the church has two

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[100] The large disparity between Antiochian Orthodox parishes in the two countries is due not only to a higher number of parishes formed by Syrians and Lebanese in the United States, but also to an aggressive proselytizing campaign by the Antiochians in the United States. Today, many Antiochian parishes in the United States are made up entirely of converts from Catholic and Protestant churches.

[101] I discovered the number of Antiochian Orthodox, Melkite, and Maronite churches in Brazil in the course of my interviews. For the Antiochian Orthodox in the United States, I consulted the official website of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America at http://www.antiochian.org. I found information on the Melkites in the United States at the official website of the Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Newton, which governs all Melkite churches in the United States, at http://www.melkite.org. Finally, for the Maronites in the United States, I consulted the official website of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, which governs the Maronites on the eastern seaboard of the United States, at http://www.usamaronite.org; and the official website of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon (in St. Louis), which governs the Maronites in the remainder of the United States, at http://www.stmaron.org.

churches in São Paulo. The lavish cathedral of St. Paul is located in the Paraíso neighborhood near Av. Paulista and is a one-sixth replica of the sixth-century Hagia Sofia. The cathedral is the center of religious life for the Orthodox and hosts periodic festivals that celebrate Arab and Brazilian culture, like the *festa junina* described in the introduction above. The church also maintains the small parish of Nossa Senhora da Anunciação on Rua Basílio Jafet in the Rua 25 de Março area, more to acknowledge the Arab tradition of the neighborhood than to serve an actual community, since almost all Syrian-Lebanese families abandoned their residences in the area decades ago. Nossa Senhora da Anunciação holds sparsely attended liturgies on Wednesday afternoons and occasional feast days thought the year, and the lack of any signs indicating it is an Orthodox church means that Brazilian Catholics occasionally wander in during services, thinking that it is a Catholic church offering a mid-day mass.

Figure 8 – Igreja da Nossa Senhora da Anunciação, on Rua Basílio Jafet near Rua 25 de Março in São Paulo. The first Orthodox church in Brazil, the church was constructed near the turn of the century, but a multi-story building was added on top of the church in 1952 so that the church could earn extra income from renting out the space.

Although many scholars have ignored or dismissed the role of religion in the formation of the Syrian-Lebanese community and its importance in sustaining ethnic identity, especially in the early years of the immigration movement, it is telling that before forming social clubs and before establishing non-religious philanthropic organizations, Orthodox immigrants founded and supported churches, at considerable expense. The Orthodox Church was the first Syrian-Lebanese religious group to build a church building in Brazil, and the church of Nossa Senhora da Natividade (today called as Nossa Senhora da Anunciação), built in 1904, claimed the distinction of being the first Eastern Orthodox church in the country.[102] A church in Rio de Janeiro followed in 1918.[103] By 1922, after the arrival of many more immigrants, the Orthodox community had grown enough to request a bishop, and the patriarchate in Damascus sent Archbishop Mikhael Chehade. Archbishop Chehade died prematurely in 1931, and the patriarchate, declining to send another bishop, replaced him with a monk, Archimandrite Isaias Abud, who led the Orthodox until 1958. From the 1920s to 1950s, the Orthodox established new parishes in the interior of the state of São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, and Curitiba, and in 1942 they laid the cornerstone for the cathedral in São Paulo. In 1958, the patriarchate sent Archbishop Ignatius Ferzli to Brazil to serve as the second bishop of the Orthodox Church there.[104]

During the first half century of the Orthodox presence in Brazil, the church also founded numerous social organizations such as the League of Orthodox Women and the Center for Orthodox Youth. The former carried out charity work, both in Brazil and in the Middle East, and planned social functions designed to honor important religious figures in the colony and political and religious figures in Syria and Lebanon. The league thus played an important role in maintaining community cohesion and keeping alive links to the Middle East. The Center for Orthodox Youth similarly served as a space in which the children of immigrants could maintain contact with their parents' religion and culture. By the time the center was founded, in 1948, many Syrians and Lebanese had moved away from the Rua 25 de Março district to more middle class and upscale neighborhoods to the south, and the church and the center provided one of the few opportunities for parents to expose their children to Arab culture.[105]

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102 Wadih Safady, *Cenas e cenários dos caminhos de minha vida* (São Paulo: Penna Editora, 1966), 232-234.
103 Duoun, 213.
104 Wadih Safady, 242.
105 Ibid., 248-261.

The history of the church was not without its share of controversy. Wadih Safady blames the failure of the faithful to consistently support the church financially for the premature death of Archbishop Chehade from a heart attack in 1931. In addition, due to the presence of both Syrians and Lebanese in the church, the Orthodox felt more keenly the effects of the simmering conflict between Syrians and Lebanese that had been building since the French division of the region into separate protectorates after World War I. A bitter battle in the 1930s over the proposed renaming of the still-unfinished Hospital Sírio to the Hospital Sírio-Libanês sharply divided the church in São Paulo along regional lines, and the community divided again in the late 1950s over whom to recommend to the patriarchate in Damascus for the position of Archbishop, with Syrians and Lebanese supporting different candidates.[106] The able leadership of Metropolitan Ferzli, however, helped soothe the differences within the church, and by 2005, when popular protests in Lebanon forced the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country, the controversy provoked little more than spirited discussion in the cathedral and wider Syrian-Lebanese social circles in Brazil. In 1997, Archbishop Ferzli retired and was replaced by Metropolitan Damaskinos Mansour, who leads the Antiochians in Brazil today. Currently, the Orthodox have eleven priests in the diocese of São Paulo, four of whom serve at the cathedral in São Paulo. Of these eleven priests, four are Arabs from Syria, two are Arab Brazilians, one is Arab Chilean, and four are Brazilians with no Arab descent. The church has no seminary in Brazil, and since the cost of sending candidates for the priesthood to the Antiochian seminary in Balamand, Lebanon is prohibitive, the church trains new priests via a correspondence program in English administered by the Antiochian archdiocese in the United States.

The reality of life in Brazil, where the Orthodox were a tiny religious minority, led to a number of changes in the church and accommodations to Brazilian religious practices. Orthodox churches traditionally do not provide seating except for the elderly, and the congregation remains standing for the entire liturgy. In Brazil, however, as in other countries of the Arab diaspora, the Orthodox installed rows of pews identical to those used in Catholic churches, and the congregation began to sit and stand at specified points during the liturgy. When the new cathedral was completed in São Paulo in the early 1950s, it contained a small organ to accompany the choir, in spite of the fact that Orthodox liturgies were traditionally sung without musical instruments of any kind. The iconography of the cathedral also evidences the influence

[106] Ibid., 235-242.

of the Brazil's dominant Roman Catholic faith. Instead of the traditional image of Christ Pantocrator that adorns the inside of the domes of most Orthodox churches, the cathedral has an enormous icon of God the Father as a stern, elderly man seated on a throne of clouds. Although this image is common in the Catholic iconographic tradition, the Orthodox traditionally considered physical iconographic representations of God the Father as theologically problematic, since the theology of the Incarnation states that only God the Son became incarnate and can thus be represented in artwork. Another icon hints at still other religious and social influences, as a large icon of St. John writing his Gospel features the Masonic pyramid and all-seeing eye in the upper-left corner.[107]

Figure 8 – St. Paul Orthodox Cathedral in São Paulo.

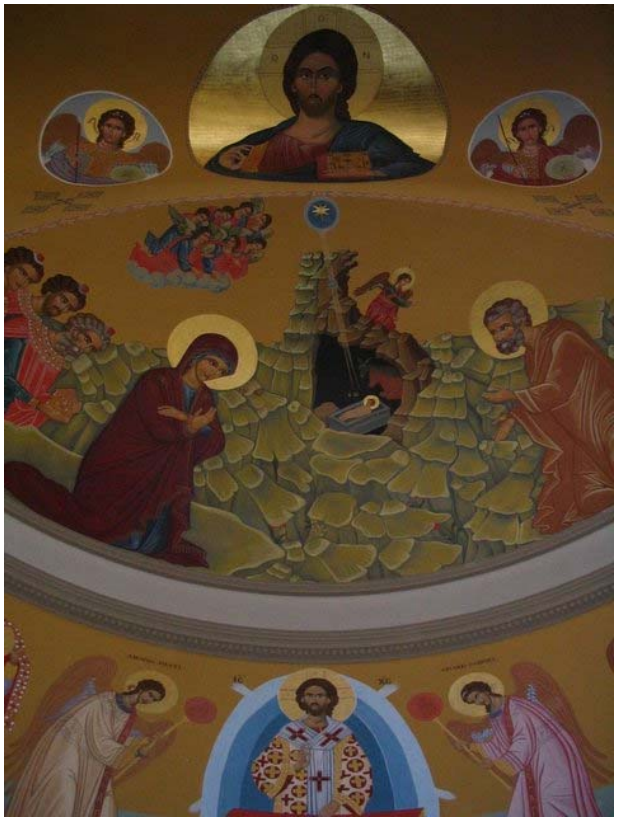

Figure 9 – Traditional Byzantine iconography in the Orthodox cathedral.

[107] One of Greiber, Maluf, and Mattar's interviewees related that his father, who was heavily involved in the construction of the cathedral, was a 33rd degree Mason (Greiber, Maluf, and Mattar, 214).

Figure 10 – Icon in the Orthodox cathedral of St. John composing his Gospel. Note the Masonic pyramid and eye in the upper left corner.

Figure 11 – The interior of the Orthodox cathedral. The presence of pews indicates an accommodation to Western religious norms.

Figure 12 – Icon of God the Father in the dome of the Orthodox cathedral. The figure of God the Father is not traditionally associated with Eastern iconography and is a result of the influence of Western sacred art.

When the first immigrants established churches in Brazil, they celebrated the liturgies and other services in Arabic, since that was the first language of all the parishioners. In the 1950s, Knowlton reported that younger members, who usually spoke little or no Arabic, were pressuring the church to celebrate the liturgy in Portuguese, but the older members of the parish (who were supporting the church the most financially), opposed the change. As a compromise, the cathedral in São Paulo began celebrating a portion of the liturgy in Portuguese but retained most of the liturgy in Arabic.[108] This situation changed in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Arabic in the liturgy was gradually almost completely substituted for Portuguese, with only a few prayers left in Arabic. Currently, the Sunday liturgies at the cathedral are almost entirely in Portuguese. Priests in the other Antiochian parishes in Brazil can use their own judgment in selecting the language to use in the liturgy, and the decision usually depends first on the ethnicity of the priest (priests who are Brazilians of non-Arab descent usually cannot celebrate the liturgy in Arabic), and second on the ethnic composition of the parish (parishes with all Syrian and Lebanese parishioners will usually celebrate more of the liturgy in Arabic, provided they have a priest who speaks Arabic). It is notable, however, that during the most solemn and tradition-laden time of the year – Holy Week and Easter – the cathedral reverts to performing large portions of the services in Arabic. Syrians and Lebanese who never attend the Orthodox church the rest of the year often come to the Holy Week services. Although most of these parishioners do not speak Arabic, the church chooses to perform its services in Arabic at precisely the time when the most people of Arab descent are in the congregation. To a certain extent, then, the Orthodox Church sees itself as having a responsibility to preserve its Middle Eastern roots and Arabic culture, and although it has adopted the use of Portuguese as a pragmatic measure, when the services are the most solemn and the most important, the church returns to its Arab heritage.

Through all of these controversies and liturgical changes, the Antiochian Orthodox churches in Brazil remained overwhelmingly Arab, and few Brazilians of other ethnic backgrounds sought to join. Within the church, most marriages took place between members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony, and intermarriage remained rare, especially for women. Baptismal records from 1959, the first year the cathedral recorded baptisms in Portuguese instead of Arabic, are illustrative. Out of 240 baptisms performed in 1959, 199 (82.9%) were for children with at least one Arab parent. Virtually all of the remaining forty-one baptisms were for children of

[108] Knowlton, 290.

other Orthodox immigrants like Greeks and Ukrainians, who at the time lacked their own churches in São Paulo. Out of the 199 children with at least one Arab parent, 151 of those (75.9%) came from parents who both had Arab surnames. Only thirty-eight (19.1%) had an Arab father and a non-Arab mother, and only ten (5.0%) had an Arab mother and a non-Arab father.[109] These statistics reinforce what Arab Brazilians have stated in interviews for virtually all studies conducted over the last half century – for many years, members of the colony exhibited a strong preference for endogamy. The 1927 study cited by Ellis Jr. indicated only a 50.5% rate of endogamy among Syrian-Lebanese immigrants – these baptismal statistics, then, indicate that the most religious families in the colony, those who brought their children to be baptized, were even more likely to marry within the colony.[110] This pattern changed little until around 1980, as the tables below show.

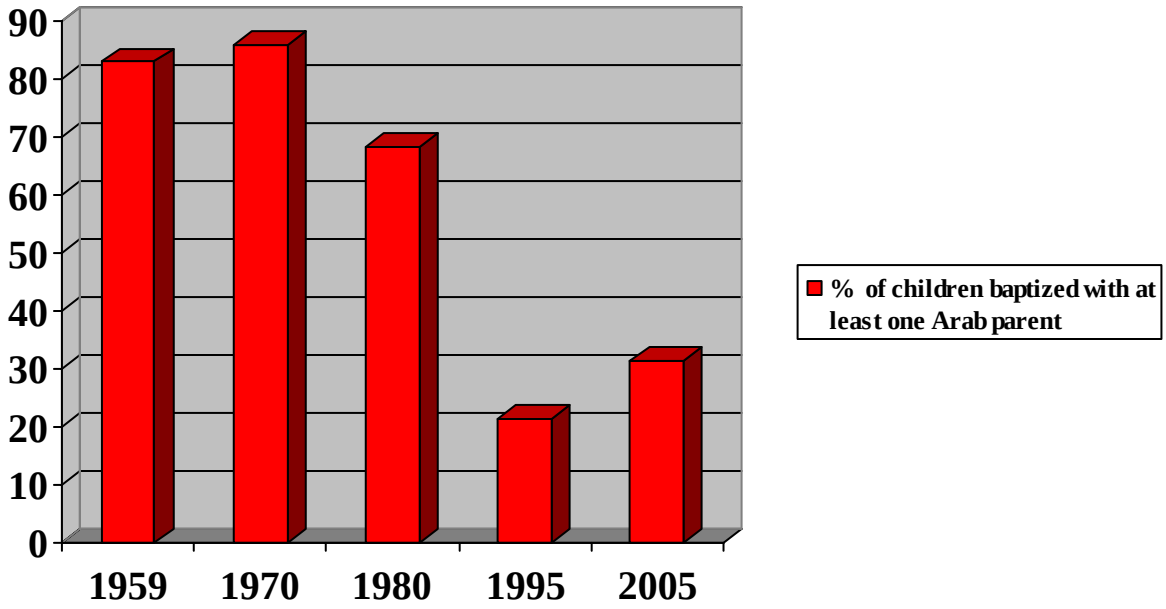

Figure 13 – Changes in the percentage of children with at least one Arab parent baptized at the Orthodox cathedral in São Paulo, 1959-2005.

[109] Source: *Registro Batismos*, Books 1-7 (1959), books 20-22 (1970), books 29-33, 35A (1980), books 50-51 (1995), and book 61 (2005), Catedral Ortodoxa de São Paulo.

[110] Ellis Jr., 205.

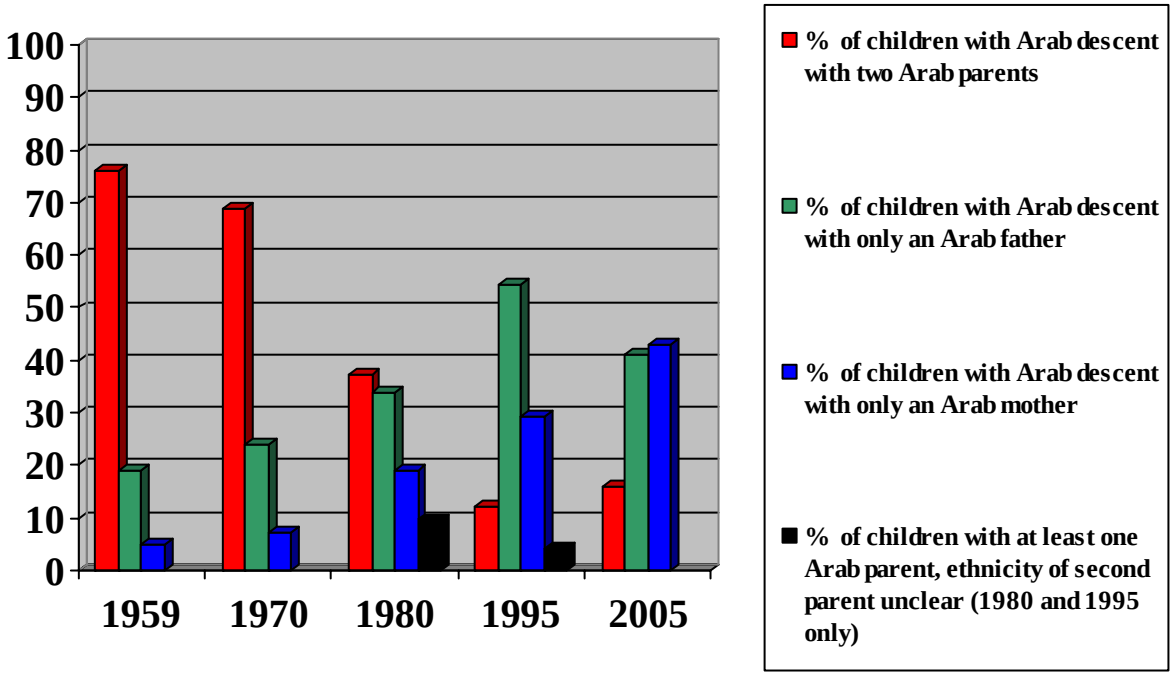

Figure 14 – Changes in the percentage of children born to two Arab parents, an Arab father and a non-Arab mother, and a non-Arab father and Arab mother at the Orthodox cathedral in São Paulo, 1959-2005.

Until the 1970s, the vast majority of children baptized in the Orthodox cathedral had at least one Arab parent, and the vast majority of those children had two parents from within the community. Furthermore, when only one parent was of Middle Eastern descent, it was nearly four times as likely that that parent would be the father. This may indicate that men were much more likely to marry outside the colony, as Truzzi pointed out, or it may simply indicate that women who married outside the colony joined their husband's religion and baptized their children in his church.[111] By 1980, however, the percentage of children born to at least one Arab parent had begun to drop, and by 1995, these represented only 21.4% of total baptisms at the cathedral, with an increase to 31.4% in 2005.[112] In fact, in the 1995 and 2005 baptismal records, surnames like Pastorelli, da Silva, and even Yakamoto are just as common as surnames like Haddad, Jafet, and Jorge. The other key change over the five years reviewed was the steady increase in the percentage of children born to an Arab mother married to an non-Arab father,

111 Truzzi (1992), 31.

112 This increase, along with an increase in the percentage of baptized children with two Arab-descended parents, does not indicate a revived interest in religion among members of the colony between 1995 and 2005. In fact, the total number of baptisms was significantly fewer in 2005 as compared to 1995, while the number of baptisms involving parents of Arab descent dropped only slightly. This overall drop in baptisms meant that the percentage of baptisms involving parents of Arab descent rose.

indicating either increased freedom for women to marry outside the colony, or heightened insistence by women that their non-Arab husbands raise their children in the Orthodox Church.

The baptismal records also hint at changes taking place within the colony regarding views toward religion, ethnicity, and gender. The 1959 baptismal certificates contain a blank for religion, place of birth, and nationality of each parent. In addition, they contain a space for the name of the maternal grandfather, implying that the woman has no identity separate from her father, while the man can be listed autonomously, without any mention of his father. Virtually all of the 1959 certificates indicate that both parents were Orthodox. This is most likely due to the fact that the Orthodox cathedral will only perform weddings for couples in which both bride and groom are confirmed in the Orthodox Church; as a result, most children baptized would have been born to Orthodox parents, even if one of the parents had been Melkite, Maronite, or Roman Catholic before the marriage. In addition, the 1959 certificates show a high percentage of parents who were born in Syria or Lebanon and whose nationality is listed as Syrian or Lebanese. By 1970, however, almost no one filling out the baptismal certificates (parents, godparents, or priests) were bothering to include the religion of the parents.[113] Furthermore, markedly fewer parents listed their nationality as Syrian or Lebanese. By 1980, the spaces for religion, nationality, and the name of the mother's father vanished altogether, indicating less emphasis in the church on ethnicity, religious distinctions, and the identification of women according to who their fathers were.

The drastically increased percentage of baptisms since 1980 involving no parents with Arab surnames points at another important trend – the conversion of Brazilians of other churches to the Orthodox Church. This only began in the 1970s, when the church replaced most of the Arabic in its services with Portuguese. The great majority of converts are former nominal Catholics who become Orthodox because they find the liturgy beautiful, or because they are attracted by the tradition of the church. One interviewee charged that many converts simply join the Orthodox Church in order to be allowed to marry in the lavish cathedral. In sharp contrast to Orthodox churches in the United States, where over the last 20 years Catholic and Protestant converts have become some of the most faithful members, as a rule the converts in São Paulo are

[113] The certificates had the blank for religion following the word *cristão*, with the person completing the certificate expected to fill in *ortodoxo, maronita, católico*, etc. In an amusing illustration of the relaxed attitude among many in the colony toward religion, some parents in 1970 appeared confused by the blank after the word *cristão*, entering the word *sim* (yes) instead of the specific denomination. Apparently the distinctions between the various churches that were so important in Syria and Lebanon did not matter as much to Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil.

not especially active. Syrian-Lebanese members appear to remain the most active and influential members of the church, and they provide the bulk of the financial support for the cathedral. A plaque in the cathedral commemorating a 1987 building project lists sixteen major donors, all with Arabic surnames. Nevertheless, the sheer number of non-Arab Brazilian converts has the potential to threaten the Arab nature of the church, and the church has worked hard to preserve both its Arab character and Syrian-Lebanese culture in general. As mentioned above, the church conducts services in Arabic during the most important times of the liturgical year. Visiting political dignitaries from Syria and Lebanon often make an appearance at the cathedral, and the bishop and priests never miss an opportunity to recognize them. One priest at the cathedral asserted that this desire to preserve Syrian-Lebanese culture is not simply a case of immigrants struggling to save their traditions; it is also a fundamental responsibility of the Orthodox Church, which in most countries is strongly associated with the national culture. Thus in Brazil, the Orthodox Church has dual responsibilities – to preserve the culture of its Syrian-Lebanese parishioners, but also to accept the culture of Brazil and adjust their liturgical language and some of their traditions accordingly.

The political situation in the Middle East comprises another important arena in which the Antiochian Orthodox remain acutely conscious of their Arab roots, and the church sees itself as a representative of Syria and Lebanon to the Brazilian government and people. In response to the recent bombardment of Palestine and Lebanon by Israel, Metropolitan Damaskinos sent a formal letter to Brazilian president Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, reminding him of the "fraternal and friendly relations that have always existed between Brazil and the Arab countries" and asking him to intervene in the Middle East to promote a peace process. The letter berated Israel's continuous violation of international law and the human rights of the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples through "daily attacks on the civilian population, bombardment of their territory, arbitrary demolition of their homes, and other such attitudes that impede these people from living with dignity in their own country." It further condemned "the absurd sacrifice of innocent lives, among them children and the elderly" and referred to Israeli actions as "true terrorism." Despite the changing ethnic composition of their church in São Paulo, the Orthodox retain a sense of connectedness with events in the Middle East and believe they have a role in promoting peace there.

At the same time that they make a concerted effort to acknowledge and preserve their church's Arab roots, the Orthodox strongly de-emphasize the differences between their church and other Christian groups. During a liturgy to mark the installation of a new parish council president in March 2006, the vice president of the council spoke briefly. Keeping in mind the presence of invited guests from other Syrian-Lebanese churches, he referred repeatedly to "our Christian faith," stating that only this common Christian faith holds solutions for the problems the world faces. Conspicuously absent was any mention of the *Orthodox* Christian faith. Although the church requires both spouses to be Orthodox to marry in the cathedral, the confirmation ceremony to receive the non-Orthodox spouses into the church is a hurried affair, with the bishop quickly applying oil to each of the new Orthodox faithful and sending them directly to the communion line during the liturgy. After one of these mass confirmations, the priest remarked in his sermon, "You are joining a faith that is really not very different from the one you just left." In an interview, this priest emphasized that these are really not conversions at all – they are simply confirmations required for non-Orthodox spouses to marry in an Orthodox church. After the confirmation and wedding, the church does not worry itself with whether the couple frequents the Orthodox church, the other spouse's church, or both. Although Orthodox churches in most countries continue to have a strict policy of not allowing non-Orthodox to take communion, the Orthodox bishop in São Paulo has instructed the priests in the cathedral to not refuse communion to anyone, even if they are certain that the person is not Orthodox, and at more than one liturgy, the priest stated before communion that all Christians who had properly prepared themselves were welcome to communicate.

The Orthodox are also involved in the ecumenical movement, and in May 2006, the cathedral hosted an ecumenical service, with the heads of the Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches in São Paulo all present. To placate the Protestants, the organizers removed all references to the Virgin Mary from the Orthodox prayers used in the service, and several speakers spoke about the need to find common ground between the Christian churches.[114] This emphasis on Christian unity and suppression of differences between Christian churches is a clear accommodation of the church to the religious attitude of

[114] The ecumenical service said as much about the limits of ecumenism as it did about cooperation between Christian groups. Either because they were uninvited or because they chose not to attend, there were no representatives of evangelical Protestant churches present. In addition, although Dom Feres Maakaroun, bishop of the Melkite Catholics, attended, Dom Joseph Mahfouz, bishop of the Maronite Catholics, did not attend.

most members of the colony, who in their daily lives largely disregard distinctions between the various Syrian-Lebanese Christian sects.

The Melkite Catholic Church

The Melkite Catholics (also known as Greek Catholics, due to their use of the Greek Byzantine rite) are Middle Eastern Catholics who use the same rite used in Orthodox churches. They were part of the Orthodox patriarchate of Antioch until 1724, when factions supporting and opposing union with Rome elected separate candidates as patriarch.[115] The pro-Roman patriarch established communion with the Catholic Church, and the Orthodox and Catholic patriarchs of Antioch each claim to be the "legitimate" head of the ancient patriarchate. There were Melkites among the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants to Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century, and Wadih Safady reported that as early as 1896, the Melkites had sent a priest to Brazil to serve the faithful there; however, no church would be built for nearly fifty years.[116] The Vatican sent another priest, Archimandrite Elias Coueter, to Rio de Janeiro in 1939. He established a parish in Rio de Janeiro, St. Basil, in 1940, and one in the Paraíso neighborhood of São Paulo, Nossa Senhora do Paraíso, in 1951.[117] The organization of the Catholic Church at the time required priests of any rite to present themselves to the local bishop upon their arrival in a new diocese. As a result, Fr. Coueter and other early Melkite and Maronite priests fell under the authority of Brazilian bishops, not their patriarch in the Middle East. Brazilian bishops were not always sympathetic to the Eastern rite, and although Melkite clergy in Brazil deny it today, some bishops brought considerable pressure against Eastern rite Catholic churches to conform to the Western rite.[118] The situation began to change in 1951, when Pope Pius XII created an "ordinariate" for Eastern rite Catholics in Brazil, placing all Melkites, Maronites, and other Eastern Catholics under the authority of one bishop, Cardinal Jaime de Barros Câmara. The Vatican raised Fr. Coueter to the rank of bishop ten years later, as an assistant to Cardinal Câmara. In 1962, the Second Vatican Council authorized the Pope to establish separate dioceses for Eastern rite Catholics, and after the death of Cardinal Câmara in 1971, the Pope created a separate diocese (called an eparchy) for Melkites and named Elias Coueter as bishop. Although the Melkite eparchy in Brazil reports

115 Khatlab (1993), 28.
116 Wadih Safady, 271.
117 Khatlab (1993), 36-37.
118 Knowlton, 291.

directly to the Vatican and not to its own patriarch, its bishop still takes part in meetings of the Melkite synod of bishops in the Middle East.[119] Today, the Melkite eparchy consists of six parishes, with the cathedral and residence of the bishop, Dom Feres Maakaroun, located in São Paulo. Half of its priests are Arabs or Arab Brazilians, and the other half are non-Arab Brazilians.

Figure 15 – The exterior of the Melkite Catholic cathedral of Nossa Senhora do Paraíso in São Paulo.

Figure 16 – Byzantine iconography in the interior of the cathedral of Nossa Senhora do Paraíso.

The Melkite cathedral holds daily noon masses, along with a Saturday afternoon mass, two Sunday morning masses, and a Sunday evening mass. The second Sunday morning mass is celebrated in Greek, Arabic, and Portuguese. Greek and Arabic were the two traditional languages of the Melkites – the church only added Portuguese in the last few decades.[120] The cathedral's location near Av. Paulista means that many passersby drift in for the weekday liturgies, and in an interview, a deacon at the cathedral indicated that due to the use of the

[119] Khatlab (1993), 36-38.

[120] When Wadih Safady wrote in 1966, Greek and Arabic were still the only two languages in use in the church (Wadih Safady, 270).

unfamiliar Eastern rite, many Brazilian Catholics are confused at to whether or not the church is Catholic. Although many Melkites lived in Paraíso when the cathedral was founded, most have moved to newer and wealthier parts of the city and only come for the Sunday mass. Even on Sunday mornings, a large portion of the congregation is made up of non-Arab Catholics.

Despite the guarantees of the Second Vatican Council to respect the liturgical traditions of the Eastern rite Catholics, the Melkites still exhibit a degree of Western liturgical influence. This is probably due to the small number of Melkites and the large number of Brazilian Catholics in their churches, not because of any pressure brought by the Catholic hierarchy. In the Eastern tradition, the priest and congregation sing the entire liturgy, but the Melkites in Brazil have adopted the Western practice of spoken congregational responses. Like the Orthodox, the Melkites allow Syrians and Lebanese from other Christian sects to take communion, making an implicit allowance for the religious flexibility of most members of the colony. In addition, as Catholics, the Melkites embrace the charismatic movement, and one of the priests at the cathedral in Paraíso regularly celebrates charismatic masses. Furthermore, although Melkite priests in the Middle East, the United States, and other Western countries are allowed to be married, the Vatican has not allowed any married Melkite priests to serve in Brazil or elsewhere in Latin America, although there are married Melkite priests in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

Overall, although they recognize their Arab roots and continue to use the Eastern liturgy, the Melkites in Brazil appear to be less concerned than the Orthodox with cultural preservation and ethnic identity. Unlike in the Orthodox cathedral, non-Arab Brazilians do not need to change religious affiliation in order to be a part of the Melkite church because as Catholics, they are already part of the same church. Thus, the Melkites must struggle to maintain their Arab identity, but since one of the most emphasized characteristics of the modern Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council is its global character, the Melkites seem to have little concern with retaining a regional identity based on Arabic culture and Syrian-Lebanese ethnicity. They do, however, celebrate their own *festa junina* with Brazilian and Arab food, and the cathedral also offers Arabic language classes, along with English and French.

The Maronite Catholic Church

The Maronites are an exclusively Lebanese religious group that claims to be the only Eastern church that remained loyal to Rome after the Great Schism of 1054 split the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Their union with Rome was solidified during the Crusades, when Catholic Crusaders temporarily established control over Lebanon and much of the surrounding area. The Maronites have traditionally been heavily involved with Lebanese nationalism, and it was the massacre of 10,000 Maronites by the Druze and Ottomans in 1860 that led to the creation of a semi-autonomous Lebanese province within the Ottoman Empire. The French, as fellow Catholics, sided heavily with the Maronites when they intervened in the region, and during the French occupation of Lebanon between the world wars, other religious groups complained that the French showed favoritism to the Maronites. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex conflict, in large part, the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990 was a rebellion by Muslims against a political system that gave Maronites political power disproportionate to their population, as well as an attempt by some Maronites to defend their privileged position. In Brazil, then, it comes as no surprise that many Maronites are ardent Lebanese nationalists, and politics in Lebanon continues to figure prominently in their cathedral in São Paulo.

The history of the Maronites in Brazil largely parallels that of the Melkites. They established a beneficent society in 1897, the first Syrian-Lebanese religious organization in Brazil, and founded a church in the Rua 25 de Março neighborhood in 1897. The church was later destroyed by urban development in the area, and after their first priest died in 1929, the Maronites remained without a priest until 1946 and without a church building until the late 1950s, when the Igreja Nossa Senhora do Líbano was built in São Paulo. The Maronites were also part of the ordinariate founded in 1951 for Eastern rite Christians in Brazil, and the Vatican assigned a bishop for the Maronites in 1962. In 1971, at the same time as the Melkites received their own eparchy, the Vatican also granted the Maronites their own diocese in Brazil, answerable directly to Rome but with continued ties to the Maronite patriarchate in Lebanon.[121] Today, the Maronites have seven parishes in Brazil. The current bishop, Dom Joseph Mahfouz, arrived in Brazil from Lebanon in 1990.

The Maronites appear to have been more heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church and its Western rite than any other Syrian-Lebanese church in Brazil. Their cathedral in

[121] Joseph Mahfouz, *Eparquia maronita do Brasil: igreja de rito oriental, católica, apostólica, romana* (São Paulo: Bispado Maronita do Brasil, 2001), 8-10.

São Paulo is architecturally indistinguishable from most other Catholic churches from the Vatican II era. The only feature in the interior of the church that hints at its Maronite heritage is a bronze bust of St. Marun, the fourth century saint recognized as the founder of the church bearing his name. There is one Sunday morning mass celebrated exclusively in Arabic, except for the words of institution for the Eucharist, which are spoken in Aramaic (the ancient language of Syria and Lebanon and the language spoken by Christ). According to a priest at the cathedral, the church holds the mass in Arabic not as a conscious effort to maintain Lebanese culture, but rather as a service to older Lebanese immigrants and more recent immigrants who speak Arabic as their first language. The music in the cathedral is especially reminiscent of a Western rite Catholic church; although the hymns are all in Arabic during the Arabic mass, they are also accompanied by a decidedly non-Eastern acoustic guitar. The Maronites also hold weekday and additional weekend masses, which, like the Melkite liturgies, are mainly attended by non-Arab Brazilians. The Lebanese parishioners for whom the parish theoretically exists appear primarily for baptisms, weddings, funerals, and important holidays, attending Western rite parishes closer to their homes the remainder of the time.

Figure 17 – Igreja Nossa Senhora do Líbano, the Maronite Catholic cathedral in São Paulo. The building was constructed near the time of the Second Vatican Council and is indistinguishable from a Roman Catholic church.

Figure 18 – The interior of Igreja Nossa Senhora do Líbano. The primary feature that distinguishes it as a Maronite church is a bust near the entrance of St. Marun, the fourth-century founder of the Maronites.

Although the Maronites appear to have lost much of their religious distinctiveness, Lebanese identity continues to manifest itself through the heavy involvement of some members of the congregation in Lebanese politics. Because of the close association between the Maronite faith and the geographic region of Lebanon, Maronites have historically been some of the most ardent Lebanese patriots, and older Lebanese and more recent immigrants in Brazil tend to get especially involved in the Lebanese political scene. The priest at the Maronite cathedral stated that many of his parishioners are active members of various Lebanese political parties and that he often has to implore them to leave their political differences in Lebanon. For many Maronites, then, religious identity is closely tied to national identity, but today that religious identity seems to exist primarily as a marker of Lebanese identity rather than possessing any value in its own right. Keeping the name "Maronite" may be important, since Maronites are always Lebanese, but retaining the rite and traditions of the church and passing them on to one's children are decidedly less important.

The Arab Evangelical Church

Due to the efforts of Protestant missionaries in Lebanon and Syria during the 19th century, a tiny minority of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants to Brazil were Protestants. They made

an initial attempt to establish a church in São Paulo in 1922, but the church, called the Igreja Evangélica Síria, soon closed. In the 1960s, a Lebanese pastor arrived in São Paulo and re-established the church as the Igreja Evangélica Árabe.[122] Today, the Igreja Evangélica Árabe is a small congregation – perhaps twenty-five members were in attendance on the weekend in which I visited. Their services are typically Protestant, with a series of hymns and contemporary choruses followed by a lengthy sermon. Yet in spite of their similarities with other Protestant churches, the evangelical Arab congregation was at least as "Arab" as any other church I encountered in the course of my research. Many in the congregation speak Arabic as their first language and are recent immigrants, and parishioners related that some of their services are held primarily in Arabic. Nevertheless, since Protestantism is not a religion traditionally recognized by Syrians and Lebanese as being a part of their national or ethnic heritage, it is doubtful that the Protestant congregation exercises much influence in the creation or maintenance of ethnic identity in the wider colony. The largely Syrian-Lebanese character of the church may be easily explainable by the fact that with so many other Protestant and evangelical churches in São Paulo today, a non-Arab evangelical Protestant will probably not feel particularly drawn to a church with the word *árabe* in the name that has Arabic script on the sign in front of the building. In other words, in a city with so many evangelical options, it is likely that only Arabs will gravitate toward an Arab evangelical church, preserving the Arab nature of the church by default.

Sunni and Shiite Islam

There were a few Muslims among the earliest Syrian-Lebanese immigrants to Brazil. In 1929, they organized the Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana, and the society made plans to build a mosque. Not only did Syrian-Lebanese Muslims donate money for the mosque, but the society also raised funds from the governments of Muslim (primarily Arab Muslim) states. The mosque, the Mesquita de São Paulo, was completed in the early 1950s.[123] Muslims began arriving in large numbers after World War II, when increased economic difficulties in Lebanon, and later, the Lebanese civil war, drove Lebanese citizens of all religions to emigrate. Although reliable statistics are not available, it appears that the majority of immigrants from the Middle East to Brazil after 1945 were Muslims, usually from Lebanon, but sometimes from Palestine, Syria, or

[122] Wadih Safady, 301-302.
[123] Ibid., 304-306.

Egypt, and occasionally from other Arab states. In addition to settling in cities where Syrian-Lebanese communities already existed, Muslim Arabs established their own colonies in other areas of the country, particularly in rapidly growing cities on the Paraguayan and Bolivian borders that offered exciting commercial opportunities. As a result, the Arab communities in such cities as Foz de Iguaçu, on the Paraguayan border, and Corumbá, on the Bolivian border, are almost entirely Muslim. Until the 1970s, only a few mosques existed in Brazil, and many immigrants and their children stopped practicing their faith. From the 1970s forward, however, as their numbers increased in Brazil during the Lebanese civil war, Muslims began to establish more mosques. As a result, it has become easier for Muslims to observe their faith in Brazil, and an interviewee stated that the current generation of Muslims is in general more religious than their predecessors. Today, Muslims report that there are at least ninety-eight mosques in Brazil, with Muslims concentrated in and around the city of São Paulo. A Sunni source related that ninety-four of these mosques are Sunni, while only four are Shiite. Out of these mosques, only about half have a cleric, and due to this shortage, devout Muslims complain that many Muslims in Brazil are not aware of the requirements and traditions of their faith. Yet Muslims claim that the vast majority of mosques still open for prayer five times each day, a sharp contrast from the Orthodox cathedral, for example, where lack of interest among parishioners limits the church to one liturgy per week and the elimination of many traditional Lenten and Holy Week services and feast day liturgies.

While Christian immigrants from Syria and Lebanon could gain a degree of acceptance in Brazilian society due to their similar religious beliefs, Arab Muslims in Brazil frequently complain of prejudice from non-Muslim Brazilians. They identify this prejudice as religious prejudice, not racial prejudice, and often blame negative media portrayals of Islam for fostering these sentiments in the Brazilian populace. As one of Gattaz's interviewees stated,

> …So you end up having prejudice against religion – not racism, but prejudice. Some people even change the way they act around me when they find out I am Muslim. The Arab is known as a tight fist, as a peddler who does good business, as a worker. But when you say *Muslim*, you are already tied to terror, to terrorism, blowing things up, killing children – this is the idea that the media puts into people.[124]

In my own research, a Muslim interviewee told me that non-Muslims in Brazil occasionally make comments along the lines of, "Oh, look, your beard is like Bin Laden's!" or, "Oh, be

[124] Gattaz, 212.

careful, the man-bomb has arrived!" He qualified himself, however, by stating that such comments are usually made in jest and claimed that surveys revealed that three quarters of Brazilians reject "the idea of [George W.] Bush that Muslims are terrorists."

Due in part to the more recent nature of Muslim immigration to Brazil, as well as the strong connection between Islam and Arab culture, it appears that many active Syrian-Lebanese Muslims in São Paulo maintain a stronger cultural consciousness than their counterparts in the Syrian-Lebanese churches. Although it may be true, as one Christian interviewee told me, that just as many Syrian-Lebanese Muslims as Christians do not practice their faith actively, those who do practice Islam actively seem to retain a strong consciousness of being Arab, as well as of being Muslim. When I attended Friday prayers at the Sunni Mesquita de São Paulo, the largest and oldest mosque in São Paulo, I observed several pronounced differences from Syrian-Lebanese churches. As in all mosques, Arabic was the language of prayer, but it was also the language of one of the three sermons, something I never observed at an Orthodox, Melkite, or Maronite church, where most Syrian-Lebanese members do not speak Arabic. Arabic was also the language in which a large percentage of the faithful conversed before (and during) the sermons.[125] There were about 200 male attendees and a dozen female attendees, and overall, the average age seemed to be somewhat younger than at most Syrian-Lebanese Christian parishes. One of the two Portuguese sermons was a highly politicized discourse on the mistreatment of Muslims in Palestine by an "invading foreign aggressor." The speaker criticized the international community for protesting when Palestinians capture an Israeli soldier ("who is actually a criminal – what do you think he was doing in Palestine, passing out candy to children?") but remaining silent when an Israeli missile kills a Palestinian family vacationing at the beach. Although many of the Palestinians are Christians, and Syrian-Lebanese Christians also side strongly with the Palestinians and Lebanese in the conflict in the Middle East, the issue does not appear to surface in the sermons at Orthodox, Melkite, or Maronite churches with the level of rhetoric employed at the mosque. After the prayers were concluded, many of those in attendance remained for a meal (Middle Eastern cuisine alongside Brazilian beans and rice). Some of the women removed the veils and head coverings they had used during the prayers and

[125] My contact at the mosque estimated that perhaps 20% of the attendees at the mosque on any given Friday can speak Arabic fluently, another 20% can understand enough to comprehend what the cleric says in his Arabic sermons, and about 60% speak or understand no Arabic at all. He further stated that parents are far too busy working and making money to concern themselves with teaching their children Arabic.

ate with their head uncovered. Once again, the primary language used in conversation was Arabic. This relatively high maintenance of ethnic identity is particularly interesting because Muslims in general often claim that in Islam, national and ethnic distinctions mean nothing – what matters is submitting oneself to the will of God and the message of the Prophet.[126] In sharp contrast to this heightened ethnic identity I observed there, my contact at the mosque unequivocally stated that his mosque has no interest in attempting to preserve Lebanese culture, other than the Arabic language, which is necessary for the practice of Islam. In theory, Islam does disregard ethnic distinctions and dissociates itself from cultural preservation, but based on my limited observations, I did not find this to entirely be the case as the Mesquita de São Paulo.

Just as in the Syrian-Lebanese churches, the mosque has a large proportion of native born Brazilian converts. Although the largest national-ethnic group at the Mesquita de São Paulo is the Lebanese, the second-largest group is made up of Brazilian converts, with Palestinians and Syrians in third and fourth place, respectively. Other mosques in and around São Paulo are made up almost entirely of Brazilian converts, and some Muslims boast that Islam is the fastest growing religion in Brazil. One interviewee estimated that there were 800,000 Muslims in Brazil ten years ago and that there are 1,500,000 today. Interestingly, an interviewee at the Mesquita de São Paulo estimated that approximately 70% of the converts at his mosque are women who convert to Islam due to its emphasis on monotheism (as opposed to the purported tri-theism of Christians), its refusal to "take money from people," and its emphasis on strong family values.

[126] Ibid., 222-223.

Figure 19 – The Mesquita de São Paulo, the oldest mosque in the country and the center of São Paulo's Sunni Muslim community.

Figure 20 – The interior of the Mesquita de São Paulo.

Figure 19 – The interior of the dome of the Mesquita de São Paulo.

One of the most difficult questions for Muslim immigrants, a decision with any number of possible answers, is to what extent they can or should adhere to Islamic law in a non-Islamic culture. Gattaz concluded that the answer varies widely from individual to individual. More conservative Muslims usually agree that Muslims in Brazil should follow Islamic law to the fullest extent possible, unless it conflict with Brazilian law. Thus, since Brazilian law does not allow polygamy, Brazilian Muslims must respect local law and marry only one woman, although the Qu'ran allows men to take up to four. On the other hand, if Brazilian law were to attempt to impose behavior that was a violation of Islamic law, Muslims would be obligated to disobey the law. Thus, if a Brazilian law were to order all Brazilians to eat pork, Muslims could not obey. According to Gattaz, this more conservative party is composed of most recent immigrants, along with some of the older immigrants, as well. Like Syrian-Lebanese Christians, however, not all Muslims concern themselves so much with following the regulations of their religion in Brazil. Gattaz noted that many of his more liberal or progressive sources had abandoned the practice of praying five times per day and stated that they did not mind that their children were not practicing Muslims, since they still had a strong sense of morality and believed in God.[127] Many other immigrants, however, take a position somewhere in the middle, arguing that there is a hierarchy of traditions and requirements in Islam. For example, a member of the Mesquita de São Paulo stated in an interview that it is most important for Muslims to follow the pillars of their faith like fasting during Ramadan, giving alms, and praying five times daily. Next in importance is treating others with respect and having good relationships with their neighbors. In addition, Muslims should "try hard" to retain Islamic traditions like men wearing beards and women using veils. Yet the secularism and differing values of Brazilian culture can make full observance of Islamic traditions difficult. As an example, an interviewee stated that many Brazilians believe that "what is beautiful should be shown" while Muslims believe that men and women should keep their bodies decently covered in public.

Like the Syrian-Lebanese churches, Muslims also invite members of other Syrian-Lebanese religious groups to important events such as the end of Ramadan and the completion of the Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca). Muslims state that the relationship between themselves and Syrian-Lebanese Christians is cordial with "no friendship and no war," but with mutual respect. The Sunni also profess to have no conflict with Shiites in Brazil but are adamant that Shiites are

[127] Ibid., 216-219.

not true Muslims and refuse to allow them to lead in prayer or give a sermon if they visit a Sunni mosque.[128]

Other religions – Armenian Orthodox and Catholics, Syrian Orthodox and Catholics, and Druze

My research did not focus on any of these groups, and their presence in Brazil is quite small. Knowlton reported in the 1950s that the Armenian churches were the center of life for the Armenian immigrants from Lebanon, but on the one occasion that I visited their services, attendance was sparse, and the congregation was overwhelmingly elderly, particularly at the Armenian Orthodox church. Both churches celebrate their liturgies today completely in Armenian, and at the Armenian Orthodox church, even the sermon was in Armenian. Their service books contain a Portuguese translation for non-Armenian speakers to follow along with the liturgy, but it is likely that the liturgy is incomprehensible to most younger attendees. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that the Armenians will change their liturgical language to Portuguese at any time in the near future. Armenian culture and the Armenian church are inextricably bound together, and during centuries of Turkish and Russian domination, the church was one of the key institutions that helped sustain Armenian national identity. The church appears to have that same role in Brazil, at least for the Armenian Brazilians who still attend. The Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholics each have a parish in São Paulo, and the Druze maintain a house of worship as well, but none of these three groups are very large in the Syrian-Lebanese community in Brazil.

Evangelical Protestantism

Evangelical Protestants have enjoyed fantastic growth in Brazil over the last half-century, especially since the 1970s, with as many as a quarter of Brazilians belonging to one of tens of thousands of evangelical churches. Although they still make up a minority of Brazil's population, evangelicals are highly active in their churches, and on any given Sunday, there are more evangelicals than Catholics in church. A June 2006 "March for Jesus" rally in São Paulo, organized to showcase the growing numerical strength of evangelicals, drew approximately 3,000,000 participants, according to police estimates. Despite their rapid growth, evangelicals

[128] This is in contrast to the situation observed in the 1950s by Knowlton, when he reported that the low number of Muslim immigrants in Brazil at the time caused the differences between the two sects to be forgotten (Knowlton, 292).

have largely failed to attract Arab Brazilians, and most Orthodox, Melkite, and Maronite clerics lightly dismiss the idea that their parishioners would ever consider joining the evangelical movement, which is viewed by many middle and upper class Brazilians as a religion for the lower classes. Nevertheless, some Brazilian evangelicals have begun to direct their attention at the Syrian-Lebanese community, considering them a neglected demographic group in the evangelization of Brazil.

I interviewed an evangelical pastor in São Paulo, Pastor José, who enthusiastically shared his vision to reach Arabs in Brazil with the evangelical message of remission of sins through a personal faith in Jesus Christ. He related that his work is made more difficult by what he considers the meddlesome influence of the Syrian-Lebanese churches, especially the Orthodox Church, which he claims exercises tremendous pressure on its members to prevent them from changing religious affiliation. Ministry among the Syrian-Lebanese requires a remarkable amount of discretion, and he stated that especially around Muslims (but also among Christians), he has to keep silent about his plans to evangelize and must instead cultivate friendships with members of the community, sharing his faith on an individual basis. In the view of Pastor José, Arabs choose to convert to evangelical Protestantism when they realize that it offers a deeper personal relationship with God than their traditional Eastern Christian or Islamic faith. A Melkite Catholic deacon, however, theorized that members of the community become evangelicals due to the social cohesion found in evangelical churches and the personal attention they pay to their parishioners.[129] It appears that for those few members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony that have chosen to convert to evangelical Protestantism, their new faith tends to diminish their connection with the Syrian-Lebanese community and Arab culture, and converts likely face some degree of marginalization in the colony. Religious affiliation is an integral part of personal identity in both Syria and Lebanon, and while the community may tolerate a change in rite from Maronite to Orthodox for marriage purposes, the abandonment of more traditional and "respectable" religions for a non-Arab religion associated with the lower classes may serve to

[129] In my own experience during research, I found myself agreeing with the Melkite deacon. During my visits to Pastor José's church and to the Igreja Evangélica Árabe, I was struck and even a bit taken aback by the friendliness of the clergy and laity alike. From the moment I walked through the door, I had a steady stream of people introducing themselves, welcoming me to their church, and attempting to ascertain whether I had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. In contrast, at the more traditional Syrian-Lebanese churches, I never once had one person introduce themselves or inquire why I was visiting. Evangelical churches in general in Brazil make a point of identifying and welcoming visitors (usually in an attempt to convert them), and that friendliness and accompanying community cohesion doubtless plays a role in convincing visitors to come back.

isolate converts. In addition, Pastor José noted that the vast majority of evangelicals are unabashed supporters of Israel and believe that the Jews are God's chosen people; as a result, when Arabs join evangelical churches and are exposed to such ideas, they often lose some contact with their own Arab culture.

Afro-Brazilian religions

Although one does not usually associate Arab Brazilians with *umbanda* or *candomblé*, the very limited information available suggests that some Syrian-Lebanese seek spiritual guidance from Afro-Brazilian religions, particularly *umbanda*. *Umbanda* has long been recognized as the more benign and Europeanized counterpart to candomblé, and it is popular with many middle and upper class Brazilians. Since most Syrians and Lebanese also belong to the middle and upper classes, it is probable that some of them have been exposed to *umbanda*. The president of the União Nacional de Tendas de Umbanda e Candomblé is an Arab Brazilian of Lebanese descent whose parents were Maronite. In a brief interview, he stated that *umbanda* has a broad appeal to all Brazilians and that Brazilians of Syrian and Lebanese descent are frequently among the attendees at *umbanda* services in São Paulo.

Relationships between the religious groups

It can be difficult to ascertain the level of cooperation or conflict between the various Syrian-Lebanese religious groups, because in interviews, most clergy simply smile and say that all the Syrian-Lebanese religious groups coexist harmoniously. As one bishop stated repeatedly when I asked him successively about other Eastern Catholics, Orthodox, evangelical Arabs, and Muslims, "Yes, yes, we are all brothers; they are all our great friends." Such sentiments appear to be correct on the surface, but they do gloss over important religious and regional divisions that still divide the colony, although not as strongly as they did one or two generations ago.[130] Certainly cooperation and cordiality do exist between the Orthodox, Catholics, Muslims, Armenians, Syrians, and Druze.[131] For many important occasions, churches or mosques invite the leaders of the other Syrian-Lebanese groups, and each group is expected to attend the socio-

[130] Kemel similarly notes that immigration has softened the rivalries between the various Christian groups and between Christians and Muslims, but it has not done away with those rivalries completely (Kemel, 53).

[131] This cooperation, however, does not extend to evangelical Protestant groups or Afro-Brazilian religions, and without exception, all clergy with whom I spoke expressed surprise or disbelief that Syrian-Lebanese would become evangelical Protestants or practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions.

religious functions of the others. Generally, this visiting does not extend to purely religious events, like an Easter service, or purely social functions, like a *festa junina*, but to functions that combine social and religious elements, like the blessing of building projects, recognitions of important religious figures in the community, and installations of new bishops, priests, and parish councils. By their presence at these events, each religious group validates itself and the other Syrian-Lebanese sects, reinforcing ethnic identity through their presence as Arab Brazilian clergy at socio-religious functions at Arab Brazilian houses of worship. Despite the erosion of Arab identity in most Syrian-Lebanese religious groups, it is notable that at important socio-religious events, they still invite each other, but not necessarily leaders from non-Syrian-Lebanese religious groups.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to sense certain divisions and rivalries lying just beneath the surface. At least among and between Catholics and Orthodox in the colony, the most important division is the rivalry between Syria and Lebanon. Traditionally, the first loyalty of Syrians or Lebanese was to their family and village, and many early immigrants saw themselves first as citizens of a particular village rather than of the Ottoman Empire, Syria, or Lebanon. These local ties manifested themselves by the 1920s in the formation of separate country clubs for immigrants from certain cities or regions. Immigrants from Syria have long resented the separation of Lebanon from Greater Syria during the French protectorate, as well the perceived desire of Lebanese to belatedly create a Lebanese identity through such steps as renaming the *sírio* colony the *sírio-libanês* colony and fighting for the inclusion of the word *libanês* in the Hospital Sírio-Libanês in São Paulo. In addition, Syrians often felt that Lebanese immigrants put on airs or considered themselves more cultured and educated and responded by pointing out Lebanon's traditional reputation as a hideout for bandits and thieves, due to its mountainous terrain. For their part, immigrants from Lebanon often do consider themselves more educated and cultured than Syrians due to the higher density in Lebanon of missionary schools and universities during the nineteenth century.[132] In recent years, Lebanese have also resented Syrian involvement in Lebanon's internal affairs.

These political and social rivalries separating Syrians and Lebanese often spill over into the religious life of the colony. Since most churches are either predominantly Syrian or predominantly Lebanese, there often seems to exist a certain divide between some churches,

[132] Truzzi (1992), 22.

which, while not openly hostile, at least manifests a degree of rivalry or discomfort. When I asked a priest at a majority Syrian church about his church's level of interaction and cooperation with a majority Lebanese church, he stated, "Ah, well, I do not know anyone there, really – *a gente não tem muita afinidade.*" ("We do not have much affinity.") Since most Christian members of the colony are second, third, and now fourth generation descendants of immigrants, these rivalries are not as severe as they once were, but older Syrian-Lebanese and recent immigrants often remain acutely conscious of them. As Fr. Michel, the Maronite priest, stated, in the age of the Internet and up-to-the-minute television news, members of the colony who are so inclined can keep up with political events in the Middle East as they unfold, adding a new dimension of currency and urgency to those arguments and conflicts that do arise about Middle Eastern politics among the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil. Individuals who are actively involved in the social and religious life of the community through churches or mosques, charitable organizations, and social clubs tend to be most conscious of these divisions, while descendants of immigrants with less religious and social involvement tend to diminish the role of regional and religious rivalries.[133]

Conclusion

After research into each of the major religious sects active among the Syrian-Lebanese community in São Paulo, it is possible to make several general conclusions, although more extensive research is still sorely needed. It is unquestionable that each of the major religious groups is actively involved in the maintenance of ethnic identity, through actions such as conducting services or sermons in Arabic, offering Arabic language courses, inviting dignitaries from other Syrian-Lebanese religious groups to attend important socio-religious functions, and preserving, to varying extents, their Eastern Christian or Muslim liturgical traditions. However, the various groups do not participate equally in the maintenance of Syrian-Lebanese identity. Muslims religious institutions, due to the more recent Muslim immigration to Brazil and the close association between Islam and Arab culture, tend to strongly emphasize Arab culture. The Orthodox, in addition to having a higher degree of autonomy than their Melkite and Maronite counterparts, also have many wealthy members who are highly involved in the community. In addition, in contrast to a long (and only recently modified) Roman Catholic tradition of

[133] Gattaz, 206.

attempting to subsume local and regional cultures to a homogenizing Latin liturgical tradition, the Orthodox historically have a very strong connection between the church and national or ethnic culture, whether it be in Russia, Greece, or the Middle East. As a result, the Orthodox are able and willing to promote Syrian-Lebanese culture and identity to a greater extent than the Eastern Catholic churches, although the years that have passed since the bulk of Orthodox immigrants arrived has served to lessen that ethnic consciousness. The Melkites and Maronites, especially the Maronites, are much less actively involved in the maintenance of Syrian-Lebanese identity, primarily because as Catholics, many of them identify more strongly with a general Catholic religious tradition than with their Syrian-Lebanese ethnic tradition. In the case of the Melkites, their Eastern liturgy and the use of Arabic and Greek help maintain their distinctiveness, and in the case of the Maronites, a strong Lebanese nationalist streak helps to preserve what remains of Maronite distinctiveness. Yet neither Catholic group appears to take much initiative in attempting to keep Syrian-Lebanese consciousness alive.

All the major Syrian-Lebanese religious groups have in recent years experienced a great influx of non-Arab Brazilians. In the case of the Christians, this appears due to the substitution of Portuguese for Arabic as the liturgical language, at least in most contexts. As evidenced by baptismal statistics, the ethnic composition of the Orthodox cathedral has changed drastically in the last 25-30 years. Since non-Arab Brazilian Catholics need only walk through the door of a Melkite or Maronite church to join, it would be surprising if the ethnic shift were not even more pronounced in those two churches. Furthermore, intermarriage between Syrian-Lebanese descendants and other ethnic groups has become so extensive that it is difficult to define exactly what an Arab Brazilian is. Regardless, the arrival of other Brazilians in Eastern Christian churches and mosques does not appear likely to abate any time soon, and only time will tell the effect that they will have on the Arab nature of the religious groups and the identity of the wider Syrian-Lebanese colony, especially those more religious and involved descendants of immigrants who attend the churches and mosques.

To a varying extents, it appears that the churches are also influenced by changing perceptions of religion, ethnicity, and identity within the Syrian-Lebanese colony. Although religious affiliation is such an integral aspect of personal and family identity in Syria and Lebanon, the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil in general have a much more fluid attitude toward religion, and many Christians exhibit no unease about moving back and forth between a variety

of churches. The Syrian-Lebanese churches have adapted accordingly, allowing non-members to take communion and themselves becoming more liturgically eclectic, adopting the use of organs, acoustic guitars, Western iconography, and pews.

During the 1950s, the Orthodox who baptized their children in the cathedral appeared to have a much higher rate of endogamy than the Syrian-Lebanese population as a whole, implying that the members of the colony who were most likely to be involved in the church were also those most likely to retain a strong connection with a Syrian-Lebanese ethnic identity and to marry within the colony. The same appears to be true today – the Syrian-Lebanese frequenting churches and mosques are also the ones who are most involved socially in the colony and thus have the strongest ties to a Syrian-Lebanese identity. The question that remains unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) is whether the most ethnically conscious members of the colony attend a Syrian-Lebanese church or mosque as part of their own attempt to retain their Syrian-Lebanese identity, or whether the churches and mosques are themselves creating and sustaining ethnic identity for their parishioners. Perhaps the answer is that both are true for different individuals and families.

The future is uncertain for Syrian-Lebanese religious institutions, for Christians more so than for Muslims, and for Eastern rite Catholics more so than for Orthodox. As more and more non-Arab Brazilians flock to their churches and mosques, as their Syrian-Lebanese parishioners continue to intermarry with non-Arab Brazilians, as more and more of the original immigrants pass away, and as society becomes more secularized in general, one wonders how much of a role the Syrian-Lebanese churches and mosques will have half a century from now in creating and maintaining ethnic identity. Certainly the role of churches today is less than it was a century ago, when the Orthodox and Maronites founded parishes and charitable organizations at the end of the nineteenth century and acted as centers of community life. Regardless, Syrian-Lebanese religious institutions clearly belong on the list of entities that throughout the history of the colony have actively helped maintain ethnic identity in the colony, along with Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals, the Arabic-language press, social clubs, and business organizations. Although further research is still needed, particularly concerning the unique role of Islam among recent immigrants, this thesis has begun to fill a large gap in the literature concerning the Syrian-Lebanese in Brazil.

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