Introduction: "Turco" Immigrants in Latin America

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INTRODUCTION: "*TURCO*" IMMIGRANTS IN LATIN AMERICA

Some forty years after publication of the first English language article on Middle Eastern immigrants to Latin America (a topic that also elicited interest more recently), *The Americas* is the first among English language specialist publications to recognize the growing importance of this little-studied influx.[1] The result is this special issue on "*turco*" immigrants in the region. It enhances the readership's awareness of the Middle Eastern immigration—many of whose members have risen to positions of prominence in social, economic, artistic and political spheres—as well as enriches Latin American ethnic studies. Devoted to Armenian, Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian immigration since the second half of the nineteenth century, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim, it seeks to advance the state of knowledge of Arab and Armenian ethnicity. It also constitutes a step towards the recommended intra- and inter-ethnic studies that will no doubt come to fruition once the asymmetric understanding of the Arab immigration's various components, and of other groups, has been redressed.[2]

While scholars of Latin America have paid much attention to the now disputed notion of race over the past decades, the shift into the field of ethnic studies is much more recent.[3] Indeed, even the surface of the latter topic has only been scratched, with most work focusing either on indigenous peoples

[1] Benedicto Chuaqui, "Arabs in Chile," *Las Americas*, 4:12, 1952; Ignacio Klich, "Argentine-Ottoman Relations and Their Impact on Immigrants from the Middle East: A History of Unfulfilled Expectations, 1910-1915," *The Americas*, 50:3, 1993.

[2] See Alberto Fernández's review of *Judaica Latinoamericana II* in *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* (Tel Aviv), 6:2, 1995, 164.

[3] Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Florestan Fernandes, "Immigration and Race Relations in São Paulo," in Magnus Mörner, ed., *Race and Class in Latin America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 122-42.

or, more rarely, European immigrants. Numerous reasons help explain the limited research on Arabs. From a social perspective, the lack of a multi-ethnic outlook throughout much of the region has transformed Latin Americans of Arab descent into permanent foreigners, in part because the retention of various aspects of pre-migratory culture is often assumed to signify a lack of social integration with the population at large. Indicative of this, a late 1992 public opinion survey revealed that not less than 31 percent of the 1,900 interviewees in the capital and several provinces considered the Arab ethnic group among the least integrated in Argentina, and 40 percent viewed its members as a separate people, different from the Argentine.[4] Academics have mirrored these assumptions and added to them priorities which further shift the focus away from Arabs as an "important" research topic. Scholarship conducted on immigrants involved in rural farm labor, which Arab immigrants were not, ignores the fact that many Arabs were rural peddlers. Research on urban settings usually focuses on numerically larger groups (such as Italians, Portuguese and Spaniards), with materials that may be easier to access, and in languages that pose no problems, as well as home country governments and/or other institutions that are more supportive of such endeavours than the Middle Eastern ones. At the same time, those scholars interested in race relations and issues of discrimination implicitly place Arabs in the "white" or "Caucasian" category thus assuming that they are part of a privileged elite. Finally, the need to carefully examine materials in a wide variety of "non-Latin American" languages, as well as to interview people who, in many cases, are still reluctant to share their experiences,[5] has discouraged many scholars from mentioning Arabs in anything but the most superficial manner.

Readers will already have noticed a variety of terms used to describe the subjects of this issue and wondered about their meanings. Not surprisingly, such terms as Middle Easterner, Arab, "*turco*," to name but a few, carry a variety of nuances, and are constantly being constructed and deconstructed as the various immigrant groups who make up such communities struggle for legitimacy, while powerful nativists oppose their efforts. Against such a backdrop, this issue's title may seem *a priori* insensitive, if not altogether a crude misnomer, especially when recalling Arab and Armenian protestations

[4] Edgardo Catterberg and Nora Vanoli, "Attitudes Toward Jews in Argentina: A Public-Opinion Survey," American Jewish Committee, New York, 1993.

[5] In this respect, some of the actors" reluctance to be interviewed is not an experience affecting non-ethnic researchers only. Indeed, several Arab descended scholars have reported disappointing experiences not only with potential interviewees but also with access to the papers of Arab institutions. See, for example, Teresa Cuevas Seba and Miguel Mañana Plasencio, *Los libaneses de Yucatán* (Mérida, 1990), p. 38; Zidane Zeraoui, "Los árabes en México: entre la integración y el arabismo," (mimeo), 1992?

against the "*turco*" label, and the greater attachment to the Iberian peninsula, rather than to any of the countries of the eastern Mediterranean, by Spanish speaking Maghribi Jews, a group also discussed herein to whom this sobriquet has been applied as well. Not only have Arab League publicists been at pains to accentuate the fact that Turkey is definitely not an Arab state, but Armenian authors have also strenuously emphasized that they are neither Turks, nor Semites, nor Muslims nor Orthodox—such a disclaimer is actually embodied in the opening lines of an important popular history of the Armenian presence in Argentina.[6] Differently put, whereas Arabs have unsuccessfully sought to encourage Latin Americans to refrain from using the "*turco*" sobriquet with respect to them, Armenians have more successfully stressed their extreme unhappiness at either being seen as Turkish or Arab, or being equated with other non-Turkish and non-Arab Muslims, whether Christian or Jewish.

Such insistence is hardly surprising. On one level, it is consistent with the emphasis on Ottoman religious oppression placed by some Arab immigrants. At the risk of understating the economic and other considerations that prompted them to migrate, they have frequently given precedence to this among an array of decisive factors. Clearly, whenever overblown, such allusions to Ottoman oppression are difficult to reconcile, for example, not only with Mónica Almeida's reference to Ecuador's *Sociedad de Beneficencia Otomana* in the first decade of this century, but also with the *reloj otomano* in one of Mexico City's squares (offered by the Lebanese community on the centennial of that country's independence), and with the late World War I-issued ethnic guide of the Arabs on both sides of the Plate, self-described as Syro-Ottomans.[7] Should the aforementioned be interpreted as little more than ingratiating devices with the rulers of their kinsmen in Syria and Lebanon, it is worthy of note that one of the institutions created by Argentina's Syrian Muslims was a *Sociedad Otomana* (established in the Buenos Aires provincial town of Balcarce in October 1923), and that a Syrian Orthodox opened contemporaneoulsy three Montevideo-based shops called *La Otomana,* the two latter developments taking place when the Ottomans *no longer* ruled their home country.[8]

On another level, the keen interest of Armenians, eminently Christian

[6] *Asuntos Arabes* (Buenos Aires), 1:1, 1973, p. 34; Narciso Binayán, *La colectividad armenia en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Alzamor Editores, 1974), p. 7.

[7] *La Siria nueva: Obra histórica, estadística, y comercial de la colectividad sirio-otomana en las Repúblicas Argentina y Uruguay (Buenos Aires, 1917); Zeraoui, "Los árabes."*

[8] Antonio D. Seluja Cecín, *Los libaneses en el Uruguay* (Montevideo: Author's edition, 1989), pp. 55-56; Liliana Cazorla, *La inmigración siria y libanesa en la Provincia de Buenos Aires a través de sus instituciones étnicas* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Los Cedros, 1995), p. 65.

Caucasians speaking an Indo-European language, in the clearest delimitation of boundaries is not just an all too obvious sequel to the Turkish massacres. Truth be told, if the aspired differentiation were exclusively understood in that light several other important inspirations would be left unaccounted for. Indeed, the impetus for avoiding being lumped together with Turks, Jews and Arabs is also connected with a number of other realities. Of the 2,221 Armenians who arrived in Argentina during 1900-23 some could be misconstrued as Palestinians inasmuch as they hailed from a Roman-named town in Turkey's Cilicia Caesarea whose Palestinian equivalent is relatively better known.[9] Such Armenian arrivals included a future community leader, Israel Arslan, whose first name is commonly, though not exclusively, associated with Jews, while his surname, presumably an abridged version of Arslanian, coincided with that of a distinguished Lebanese Druze family (of the latter, one member, as it happens, was the Ottoman empire's consul general in Buenos Aires during 1910-15).[10] Later Armenian newcomers were re-migrants from Syria and Lebanon, a crucial fact which, among other considerations, helps explain Banco Sirio Libanés del Río de la Plata advertisements in Armenian publications, or the presence, for instance, of Syrian Jew Isaac Ades and Lebanese Maronite José Kairuz among several non-Armenian Middle Easterners invited to join the Buenos Aires Armenian community's honoring of a distinguished benefactor, Hrana Nikotian.[11]

Seen from this angle, this issue's "*turco*" title is not just a convenient appropriation of an existing label. The latter, a reflection of an irritating Latin American penchant to oversimplify by way of grouping together under a single rubric immigrants from various even conflicting regional, national and/or ethnoreligious backgrounds, was initially applied to Arabs, Armenians and Jews with documents issued by the Ottoman authorities, or perceived as hailing from areas that may have been under them. Yet the title also takes note of a more recent development, namely an acknowledgement on the part of Arab descended and Armenian scholars that the pejorative aspects of the "*turco*" sobriquet are far from being the only ones, in particular since it has come to be endowed with benign connotations as well.[12]

[9] Nélida Boulgourdjian-Toufeksian, "Armenian Immigration to Buenos Aires, 1900-1925," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, 6, 1992-93.

[10] Binayán, *La colectividad*, pp. 22-23.

[11] See, for example, the Armenian church's monthly bulletin, *Hai Guetron* (Buenos Aires), Special issue, 1936; "La colectividad armenia de Buenos Aires a su distinguido miembro y benefactor don Hrana Nikotian, Buenos Aires, 30 de julio de 1936."

[12] Elie Habalián D., "La comunidad venezolana-levantina y la sociedad venezolana: Primera aproximación" (mimeo), Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas, May 1991; Gladys Jozami, "La iden-

Lastly, the unifying "*turco*" label is meant to evoke some features shared by all three groups.While it would be idle to ignore their specificities, it is as well not to sweep under the carpet other equally important facts.

Firstly, the early economic specialization and ethnic networks of all three groups are typical of middleman minorities, as Mónica Almeida and Ignacio Klich recall in their respective articles. Secondly, long before establishing their first institutions, early Armenian arrivals used a Turkish Jew's Buenos Aires coffee house as their meeting place.[13] Thirdly, by dint of exogamic marriages the progeny of some Syrian and Lebanese immigrants who later acquired prominence in Argentina and Brazil had a foot in both the Arab and Armenian ethnic groups. Lastly, Syrian Christian immigrants from the town of Mardin, which was allocated to Turkey when the League of Nations placed Syria under French mandatory rule, adopted Armenian surnames when landing in Buenos Aires, the latter an upshot of their self-declared perception of Argentina's greater sympathy towards Armenians than Arabs.[14]

Hence, this issue's title is not a case of expediency's triumph over political correctness, but the result of a reasoned, and hopefully well- explained decision, one that does not ignore that "*turco*" is an imposed rather than self-constructed label, and that other terms—like Arab (which may irk those who since the 1970s have chosen to see themselves as Phoenician, Lebanon's uninterrupted membership of the Arab League notwithstanding) and Middle Easterner (as with Arab, not applicable to Armenians), or the all too vague non-European—are problematic as well. Thus, if we have fallen prey to the widely understood "*turco*" we have chosen to put it in quotes to clarify our own lack of comfort with this term and with a less than perfect solution.

tidad nacional de los llamados turcos en la Argentina," *Temas de Africa y Asia* (Buenos Aires), 2, 1993. Presumably because of this, the suggestive title of a recent article described Buenos Aires early Arabs as if they had come from Turkey, rather than the Arab world. See Lilia Ana Bertoni, "De Turquía a Buenos Aires: Una colectividad nueva a fines del siglo XIX," *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, 9:26, 1994.

[13] Born in Crete, the Jew in question, Isaac Isjaqui, lived many years in Izmir before moving to Buenos Aires, where his *fonda/pensión* was situated in the downtown area where many Syrians and Lebanese also first settled. At the time, Isjaqui's Café del griego (a name consistent with the fact that Argentina's immigration authorities classed the earliest Arab and Armenian arrivals, regardless of creed, as Greeks and Turks) not only provided a meeting point for Armenians but also board and lodging for many a recently arrived Middle Easterner, especially from Turkey. Nélida Elena Boulgourdijian, "Los armenios en Buenos Aires: Primera oleada migratoria (1909-1930)," *Todo es Historia*, August 1992, p.79. See also the letter of Héctor I. Cohen Isjaqui, *Todo es Historia*, November 1992; Bertoni.

[14] Cazorla, *La inmigración siria*, pp. 113, 124.

Moving from title to contents, the various contributions to this collection take on the daunting task of trying to discuss the emigration/immigration process, to probe the societal factors that have created an image of "*turcos*" in the minds of Latin America's elites, and to dissect the groups within groups that actually exist. Arabs, of course, were merely one group enmeshed in a larger "immigrant question" that plagued Latin American intellectuals, policy-makers and much of the urban middle class struggling to rise in the carefully constructed social hierarchy.[15] The discussion of immigration generally came to the fore in the wake of independence and following the abolition of slavery as the elites simultaneously began encouraging the entry of Europeans while explicitly or inexplicitly attempting to ban undesirables, defined in many cases as "non-whites." Arabs fell outside of the desirable category and thus posed a particular challenge because, while not banned from entering most Latin American countries until the late 1920s, they were also never expected to migrate. What placed Arabs in such a contradictory and perplexing role is that they were never officially designated as "non-white" since they were not from the Far East or Africa, and instead bore some resemblance to other Mediterraneans, the latter southern Europeans. Thus, by the early 1920s, Latin America's elites, who had expected desirable, and thus permitted, immigrants to transform and "whiten" culture suddenly discovered a number of unwelcome groups legally within their midst.

The articles also explore an unusual aspect of modern Latin American ethnic studies: that of trying to place various immigrant groups, or immigrants individually, somewhere along the assimilation/acculturation continuum.[16] In this sense the volume fits nicely with the research on indigenous people in colonial Latin America that has challenged the "conquest" notion and replaced it with an understanding of the various and successful ways in which indigenous communities rebelled against Spanish and Portuguese attempts to enslave, kill, or assimilate them into extinction in both racial and ethnic senses. By applying new theoretical notions to the study of late nineteenth and early twentieth century immigrants, this issue allows us better to understand why attempts to create fusion indexes by such important Latin American ideologues as Ricardo Rojas in Argentina, Francisco José Oliveira Vianna in Brazil, and Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcellos in Mexico, to name but a few, have not produced a sufficient challenge to the

[15] Roberto Schwarz, "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination," *New Left Review* (London), 167, (January-February 1988), pp. 77-90.

[16] Michael M. Hall, "New Approaches to Immigration History," in Richard Graham and Peter H. Smith, eds., *New Approaches to Latin American History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).

assimilationist assumptions that lie behind their work. As some articles show, regular community fights against national assimilationist policies were critical to the preservation of immigrant and ethnic culture, more important than food and dress.

Important questions about the migratory process of groups who are minorities in both the host and home countries are also raised. Indeed, the articles propose fascinating answers to the questions of why so many Middle Easterners emigrated to faraway Latin America. Population shifts and economic harship, military conscription, as well as political and religious persecution are common themes, yet the internal dynamics that may have convinced Arabs to contemplate emigration from their home countries must be understood in conjunction with the perception of political, social and economic development in Latin America that made these emigrants into immigrants. With the end of the civil wars that marked the region's post-independence years, and with the dual cooptation of the rural elite by urban centralists and the urban elite by *caudillo* politicians, Latin American nations began to emerge as carefully constructed entities with a clear vision of the future. Critical to this future were immigrants and while Arabs were never expected by Latin America's political and intellectual elites, they were not seen so negatively as to be banned, as Africans and Far Eastern Asians were in so many countries. Here technology played an important role. From the mid-nineteenth century steamships regularly plied the seas between the Middle East and Europe on the one hand, and Europe and Latin America on the other, thereby making it easier, and ever cheaper, to migrate. The growth of industrial and/or agroindustrial economies not only created a new wealth in Latin America but also a market for the merchant activities in which Maghribi Jewish, Arab and Armenian immigrants flourished. Many of these immigrants became peddlers in the mid/late 1800s as they arrived to the wider markets created by the end of Latin America's civil wars, the export economy and the new wage labor regimes created by the abolition of slavery. By the twentieth century a proto-middle class had formed, or at least a class of workers with some disposable income, and with it came a desire for previously unavailable goods. Yet product distribution did not progress as efficiently as industrial growth and capital redistribution. In cities and rural areas, peddlers picked up the slack, distributing products in an efficient and inexpensive manner.

Peddling was a prototype of Arab, Jewish, and other groups' economic integration in Latin America. Indeed, the internal dynamics of these immigrant communities led store or factory owners to sell on credit piece goods or housewares to the newcomers, often choosing merchandisers who were

kinsmen or townpeople in their countries of origin. The willingness to work intensively was so lucrative that it often led to small shop or factory ownership by the early peddlers and even more rapid accumulation of capital. Over time railroads began to crisscross Latin America, bringing products to stations. Soon the physical spaces around the stations were populated with people going to and from their places of labor, and the opportunity for the creation of stores emerged, filled rapidly by former Arab peddlers. With a niche carved out, Arabs, Armenians and Jews began to ascend the economic ladder, especially in the textile, shoe and garment industries. With minimal legislative restrictions on entry, at least until the late 1920s, those wanting to leave their homeland learned that Latin America was a place of potential prosperity.

In summary, the "*turco*" experience in Argentina, Brazil and several other Latin American states shows how deeply immigrant communities are affected by their host countries. That most Middle Eastern immigrants were Christian only made the vexing issue of the entry of large numbers of people who were neither defined as white nor black all the more provocative for many a Latin American élite, especially those endowed with a myth of racial democracy and lacking a pluralist ethnic perspective.[17] For one thing, many of the region's intellectual and political leaders sought to "whiten" or "Europeanize" their respective countries; for another, they sought to achieve this without ending the clear economic benefits that Arab peddlers (and later shop and factory owners) provided. This tension between economic desirability and social undesirability meant that the public discussion of "*turcos*" was heated and long lasting. Nevertheless, because of the purported pre-migratory experiences of their ancestors in southern Europe and the Iberian peninsula,[18] many Middle Easterners increasingly sought to respond to unflattering characterizations on the part of host country intellectuals and others, as well as place themselves in the "acceptable" category of Latin American societies, by claiming to be uniquely qualified among various immigrant groups to transform themselves into Argentines, Brazilians, etc.

All the above-mentioned themes can be found throughout this collection.

[17] Thomas E. Skidmore, "Fact and Myth: Discovering a Racial Problem in Brazil," *Working Paper 173*, Helen Kellog Institute for International Studies, Notre Dame, 1992; Jan Fiola, "Race Relations in Brazil: A Reassessment of the 'Racial Democracy' Thesis," *Occasional Papers*, Program in Latin American Studies, University of Massachussets, Amherst, 1990; Pierre-Michel Fontaine, ed., *Race, Class and Power in Brazil* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, 1985).

[18] See, for example, Emir Arslan, *Los árabes* (Buenos Aires: Espasa Calpe, 1943), third edition, pp. 22-24; Ibrahim Hallar, *Descubrimiento de América por los árabes* (Buenos Aires: author's edition, 1959).

Despite the fact that the largely Christian Arab influx into Argentina is one that so far has elicited most scholarly interest, its Muslim component has plainly been virgin territory until now. Hence, Gladys Jozami's attempt to make sense out of a maze of widely divergent figures on Argentina's Muslim population—a problem once confronted by Ryszard Stemplowski in respect of the Ukrainians in the country—represents the first serious endeavour to explain "the incredible gap" between Argentine official data and Muslim self-estimates, her obvious preference for the former not being divorced from prudent references to their imperfections. Based on unscientific and politically motivated projections of the early immigrants' numbers, as well as on the erroneous assumption that—exogenous marriages notwithstanding—the patrilinear transmission of Islam in societies where Muslims predominate can yield similar results in an eminently Catholic environment. Such self-estimates—figures often mentioned by the media—laid to rest claims that the Muslim community excludes from their counts lapsed followers of Islam. Like Dominique Schnapper's warning note against reliance on ethnic self-estimates to quantify France's Muslims and Jews,[19] Jozami draws some interesting parallels between inflated Muslim and Jewish self-perceptions of their respective numerical strengths in Argentina, as well as throwing light on the similarities and differences between both groups' patterns of settlement. Here, the implicit underlying assumption is that the Middle Eastern immigration's Muslim component is in some respects still that whose experience most resembles the predominantly Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews in Argentina. In addition, Jozami provides crucial insights into the prejudices towards Middle Easterners in general and Muslims in particular of Argentina's Catholic church and society at large, such prejudices being one of the chief reasons for the latter group's low profile.

Though presently ruled by a Syrian Muslim-descended Catholic, whose wife was Latin America's first Muslim first lady prior to the presidential couple's estrangement, Argentina is far from having eradicated all ethnic prejudice. Hence, the reasons that prompted Muslims to make themselves scarce are, sad to say, still there. Had anti-Muslim bigotry lost significance, a civilized and legitimate critique of president Carlos Menem's policies and heavy reliance on governance by decree would, no matter how blunt, not countenance a leading opposition legislator's reference to the head of state as "a Muslim deity."[20] Likewise, the manifest unhappiness of Buenos

[19] Dominique Schnapper, "La citoyenneté à l'épreuve: les musulmans pendant la guerre du Golfe," *Revue Française de Science Politique* (Paris), 43:2, 1993, p. 191.

[20] *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), 1991.

Aires archbishop Antonio Quarracino at congressional approval in December 1995 of a government initiative granting Saudi Arabia a site to build a mosque in Buenos Aires (a move partly inspired by the wish to neutralize Iran's image as the country that so far has been the most effective promoter in Argentina of the Muslim cause), would not have been translated into a public and ominous vindication of pre-Vatican Council language describing Islam as one of the "great heresies," as well as Muhamad and, by implication the Saudis, as the descendants of "degraded idolaters from savage Arabia."[21] If such an outburst reveals an Argentine primate not too well read since his formative period and/or impervious to *aggiornamento,* this is due to the Holy See's ecumenical attitude towards non-Christian faiths, Muslims included, which that Council inaugurated three decades ago. From this angle, Jozami's question mark on Islam's assertiveness in Argentina on the eve of the twenty-first century—an assertiveness which Cardinal Quarracino, always quoting an Englishman's writings of the 1930s, fears may lead to "the renewal of Islam's anti-Christian pressure of days bygone"[22]—is consistent with the fact that, some well-crafted (though largely bland) letters of disapproval aside,[23] no Argentine Muslim took serious issue with the primate's views in public. In their stead, Mohsen Rabbani, Iran's outspoken cultural attaché in Buenos Aires, responded to Quarracino, with the latter's apologies in a private communication to the Iranian diplomat presumably stemming from the Holy See's obvious discomfort with anti-Muslim bigotry, rather than a sudden intimation that the Cardinal had been swayed by Rabbani's theological arguments.[24]

[21] *Clarín,* 27 March 1996.

[22] Interestingly, the Englishman repeatedly quoted by Cardinal Quarracino was Hillaire Belloc, a Catholic author avidly read by Argentina's extreme nationalists of the 1930s and 1940s, as well as others. On the reading materials of Argentina's nationalists, see Mario C. Nascimbene and Mauricio Isaac Neuman, "El nacionalismo católico, el fascismo y la inmigración en la Argentina (1927-1943): Una aproximación teórica," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe,* 4:1, 1993, p. 124. Inevitably, the choice of Belloc and Cardinal Quarracino's earlier complimentary references to the late Leonardo Castellani, a long deceased Jesuit intellectual and failed Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista (ALN) parliamentary candidate in 1946, who, like the original ALN, was Judeophobic, may also give rise to legitimate questions about the sincerity of his Judeophilia. Quarracino's enthusiatic pro-Israeli bent after a trip to the Holy Land in the 1960s, as well as his role in the Christian-Jewish dialogue, need neither be seen a priori as automatic proof of Judeophilia nor necessarily be taken as inconsistent with a possible animus against all Semites, whether Arab or Jewish, especially when recalling Castellani's own qualified advocacy of a Jewish state in 1945.

[23] *Clarín,* 12 and 23 April, and 2 May 1996.

[24] Antonio Cardenal Quarracino to Hiyyatulislam Mohsen Rabbani, 9 April 1996; *Clarín,* 17 April 1996. Unlike his apologies in private, a later article by the Buenos Aires archbishop only suggests a belated endorsement of the Holy See's dialogue with other Christian and non-Christian creeds, Islam included, with his sole self-admitted error in respect of the Muslims being his reference to them as Muhammedans. See *Clarín,* 22 May 1996.

Jozami's pioneering effort in respect of Argentina's Muslims has its counterpart in Mónica Almeida's piece on the Arabs in Ecuador—largely Lebanese, but also Syrians and Palestinians—with recent developments unexpectedly and unerringly adding poignancy to both case studies. Almeida's contribution is part and parcel of the blossoming interest in the Arab immigration to the Andean and Central American republics, countries where nearly non-existent official data and ethnic press render imperative the use of oral sources, in addition to the snippets of information laboriously gleaned from combing documents in various repositories. Based on ethnic sources—largely, though not exclusively, oral—as well as Ecuadorean commercial handbooks and press clippings, and foreign diplomatic papers, Almeida charts the rise of Lebanese immigrants from petty itinerant tradesmen to wholesalers, industrialists and bankers, an evolution akin to that of their co-ethnics in the region, as well as consistent with that of other so-called middleman minorities. Along the way, Almeida has an illuminating discussion on the role of various Arab-descended Ecuadoreans on the right and left of the political divide. Like Jozami's treatment of the tragic death of Menem's son, the import of such a contribution does not hinge on the amount of media attention given to the fleeing of Ecuador's Conservative vicepresident Alberto Dahik, himself of Lebanese ancestry, or on the Social Christian Jaime Nebot Saadi and the populist Abdalá Bucaram, the two Arab-descended presidential candidates in the May 1996 elections; instead, it lies in what it tells us about the Arab immigrants' relatively successful integration to that country—one which, prejudice aside, is generally duplicated in other Latin American states—and also in its debunking of stereotypes concerning their political preferences. Without ignoring the greater attraction exerted by populist and other non-Marxist parties, Almeida shows that it is wrong to present the Middle Easterners as monolithically on the right of the political spectrum, a misrepresentation commonly found in respect of Argentine and other Latin Americans of Arab parentage.

Shifting attention to a non-Arab, and originally non-Middle Eastern group, Roberto Grün explores the ways in which the Armenians have constructed an identity in São Paulo. He argues that the attempt at separation from the "*turco*" identity created an Armenian ethnicity based on "triumphs embedded in the collective memory," which have enabled the group to define themselves as non-Semites. Basing his research heavily on oral interviews, Grün also shows how Armenian economic specialization, notably in the shoe business, and the lack of a recognized homeland, have given the group an almost unique opportunity to create a social legitimacy vis-á-vis Brazilians of all backgrounds. Grün's research is also notable in its

proposition that religious, cultural and economic activities in Brazil have simultaneously strengthened notions of an Armenian ethnic community while weakening the traditional bonds between community members and ecclesiastical authorities. The latter, Grün proposes, had a "quasi-monopoly" on community power. In this sense Armenians reflect a typical pattern among immigrant groups as deep generational divisions, often aggravated as Brazilian born members of the community receive university educations, become a central feature of ethnic identity.

Prospective researchers should note that Grün and Almeida, like many other authors of significant contributions on the Middle Easterners in Latin America, have succeeded in proving that it is unnecessary to be a member of the ethnic groups concerned to gain access to their sources, and that proficiency in Armenian and Arabic, unquestionably always a useful tool, is neither a *sine qua non* nor a prerequisite for anyone considering research on them, just as a working knowledge of Yiddish, valuable as it indeed is, does not figure among the requirements for work on the Ashkenazi Jews.

Sharing Grün's theoretical approach, Jeffrey Lesser takes a different look at Brazil arguing that ethnicity is as much a product of the host country as of the immigrant group. By a broad examination of the immigration patterns of "*turcos*"—whether they be from Syria and Lebanon, or Christian, Muslim and Jewish—Lesser suggests that Arabs constructed hyphenated identities for themselves even though Brazil rejects such social constructions. Indeed, Middle Eastern immigrants were so intent on constructing an acceptable place for themselves within a Brazilian context that they created public myths that suggested "*turcos*" were more "original" or "authentic" than all other immigrant groups in Brazil. Additionally, Lesser explores the construction of a "Syro-Lebanese" identity by first looking towards the images of Arabs in Brazil prior to the waves of Middle Easterners. This, he argues, set the stage for a conflation of Arab and Brazilian identities by Arab immigrant intellectuals in the twentieth century. Yet the attempt to create a legitimized space for Arabs was not easy as Brazilian intellectuals and politicians sought to ban or limit both Arab entry and maintenance of culture. The public clash over identity between Arab and Brazilian élites meant that the idea of "the Arab" came to encompass groups as disparate as North African Jews and Lebanese Christians, even as the various Middle Eastern communities fought to reject the general "*turco*" label.

With Ignacio Klich, we move from actual immigration to Argentina on to other players' ideas on migration of undesirables and population exchanges

with that country (always neater on paper than in practice). Though still a taboo subject for those not attuned to the new Israeli historiography, or who find the meticulously researched among its results too painful to stomach,[25] this is a case study on Israel and the Palestinians which, on the strength of archival materials at Argentine and Israeli repositories, as well as on published sources, allows Klich to draw a comparison with earlier notions of ridding Poland of other Slavs and Nazi Germany of non-Aryan Germans. Despite the many differences between Palestinian Arabs, Ukrainians and German Jews, such plans never materialized, among other reasons, because of the wide gulf between Argentina's advertised openness and her growing shift from spontaneous immigration to one that was more consistent with Argentine élite preferences. As part of an ongoing reassessment of the country's performance vis-á-vis Arabs and Jews, Klich questions and calibrates the degree of accuracy of claims about the Perón government's pro-Arab inclinations, as well as those of one of its most controversial immigration directors, Santiago Peralta. While clearly inimical to the larger number of Semites and Slavs wanting to land in Buenos Aires since the 1930s, Argentine policy in their respect was, according to Klich, neither as harsh nor as effective as some seem to believe.

With the exception of one, all contributors initially offered papers on the same subject, or variations thereof, at a panel on ethnic groups from the Middle East in Latin America, held at the XVIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA, Atlanta, 10-12 March 1994).[26] An important precedent to such a session was provided by another LAJSA sponsored panel organized by us, this one devoted to Arab and Jewish immigrants in Latin America, and held at an earlier LASA Congress.[27] Both sessions were chaired by then LAJSA president Judith Laikin Elkin, with Walter Zenner serving as a discussant in the more recent one.

[25] Benny Morris, "The New Historiography: Israel Confronts its Past," *Tikkun* (Oakland), 3:6, 1988, pp. 19, 23, 99, 102; Ilan Pappe, "The New History and Sociology of Israel: A Challenge to the Old Version," *Palestine-Israel Journal* (Jerusalem), II:3, 1995, pp. 70-76.

[26] Organized by this issue's guest editors on behalf of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA), the session also included useful papers by Jorge Bestene, Diana Epstein and Darío Euraque, which have since seen the light of day elsewhere. See Darío A. Euraque, "Formación nacional, mestizaje y la inmigración árabe palestina a Honduras, 1880-1930,' " *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos* (Buenos Aires), 9:26, 1994; Jorge Omar Bestene, "La política migratoria Argentina y la inmigración de sirios y libaneses," *Studi Emigrazioni* (Rome), 32:118, 1995; Diana Lía Epstein, "Los judeo-marroquíes en Buenos Aires: pautas matrimoniales 1875-1910," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, 6:1, 1995.

[27] This will be published as a special issue of *Immigrants and Minorities*.

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