

‘Arisen from Deep Slumber’: Transnational Politics and Competing Nationalisms among Syrian Immigrants in Argentina, 1900–1922

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Abstract. This article examines how Syrian immigrants in Argentina responded to the intersection of transnational politics and nascent nationalisms between 1900 and 1922. In particular, it studies the role of Syrian intellectuals in Argentina in advocating a variety of political allegiances that changed over time as their homelands suffered a series of intense political transformations during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The emergence of Syrian and Lebanese ethnic identities as well as an Arab racialised identity was the product of distinct political programmes circulating in the Levant and among the Syrian émigré communities in the Americas, threatening to undermine the immigrant colony’s sense of community.

Keywords: transnational migration, nationalism, immigrant politics, Argentina, Ottoman Empire

This article examines how the intersection of transnational politics and nascent nationalisms between 1900 and 1922 affected Arabic-speaking émigrés in Argentina, principally in Buenos Aires and the north-western province of Tucumán. Intellectuals from the Syrian colony in Argentina formed organisations and published newspapers promoting a variety of political

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allegiances that changed over time as their homelands suffered a series of intense political transformations during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Far from viewing the Ottoman state as oppressive, Syrian immigrants in Argentina attempted to secure diplomatic relations between Istanbul and Buenos Aires, culminating in the Consular Protocol of 1910. In the wake of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, the Syrian colony organised large-scale celebrations and intimate receptions across Argentina celebrating the return of democratic governance. The First World War and the ultimate fall of the Ottoman Empire, however, provoked a dilemma for this mutual political identity as shared senses of place and association dissolved. This existential crisis forced immigrants to grapple with the question of whether or not a Syrian community existed at all. In this space, nationalist ideologies politicised ethno-regional identities in new ways and led to a novel racialised political identity: a fellowship founded on the Arab race. These ideologies created new fault lines within the Syrian colony in Argentina, principally among the politically active cultural elite. As the drama in the homelands played out, a new local, elite-led Syrian–Lebanese immigrant identity emerged in the early 1920s which attempted to mitigate the divisiveness caused by the politics of the homeland and to act as the voice of the community.

The central issues preoccupying scholars of immigration to Latin America have concerned adaptation and integration, the construction and maintenance of an organised community, and the relationship between immigrants and the host society.¹ Global processes intersected with local particularities to shape the migration of people to the Americas, ‘creating a tangle of small local flows between certain European areas and Latin American regions of arrival’.² An immigrant’s interpersonal social network of his or her hometown and extended family affected decision processes such as choice of destination, and worked in conjunction with the immigrant’s skill set to condition the rate

¹ See Samuel L. Baily, *Labor, Nationalism and Politics in Argentina* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967); Samuel L. Baily and Franco Ramella (eds.), *One Family, Two Worlds: An Italian Family’s Correspondence across the Atlantic, 1901–1922* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Samuel L. Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); José C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850–1930* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Ronald Newton, *German Buenos Aires 1900–1933: Social Change and Cultural Crisis* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1977); Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2003); and Samuel L. Baily and Eduardo José Míguez (eds.), *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003).

² Eduardo José Míguez, ‘Introduction: Foreign Mass Migration to Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries – an Overview’, in Baily and Míguez (eds.), *Mass Migration*, p. xvi; Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, pp. 26–9, 61–120, 205–76.

of adjustment and adaptation, as well as the immigrant's ability to secure housing and employment. Once in the host society, immigrants fashioned informal social networks and formal institutions to recreate a sense of community and to defend and pursue their own aims and interests. The emergence of mutual aid societies and an immigrant press was crucial to these processes, in addition to consolidating a social hierarchy among immigrants.³ These formal institutions also helped to engage the host society and defend immigrants against prejudices and stereotypes manifested by societies in the midst of profound change. The scholarship on Arabic-speaking immigrants in the Americas has generally mirrored the concerns of researchers studying European flows. Scholars have, however, emphasised the prejudicial perceptions held by local society in the case of Arabic-speaking immigrants, and how, in spite of this perceived intolerance, this immigrant group successfully integrated into local society.⁴ More recently, scholars have begun to examine how the linkages with homeland politics affected immigrants in the United States and how return migrants influenced the development of the homeland.⁵

Scholars of contemporary transnational migration have claimed that the mass movement of people in the era of globalisation is new and distinct from the old migration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for a variety of reasons. For these scholars, migrants of the early twentieth century experienced an enduring break with their homeland, while contemporary migrants maintain close ties with the old country and participate in circular migration routes. In addition, the last wave of immigration lacked a transnational sphere, whereas 'today, immigrants develop networks, activities, patterns of living, and ideologies that span their home and the host society'.⁶

³ Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise*, pp. 69–90, 172–216; Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, pp. 277–331.

⁴ See Ignacio Klich, 'Criollos and Arabic Speakers in Argentina: An Uneasy *Pas de Deux*, 1880–1914', in Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (eds.), *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992), pp. 243–84; Christina Civantos, *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005); Lois Roberts, *The Lebanese Immigrants in Ecuador: A History of Emerging Leadership* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Alberto Tasso, *Aventura, trabajo y poder: sirios y libaneses en Santiago del Estero, 1880–1980* (Buenos Aires: Indice, 1989); Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007); Nancie L. González, *Dollar, Dove and Eagle: One Hundred Years of Palestinian Migration to Honduras* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

⁵ See Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); and Akram Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870–1920* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

⁶ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 'Transnational Projects: A New Perspective', in Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (eds.), *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*

The development of new transportation and communication technologies is the critical difference, as scholars insist that before the First World War, 'early transnational economic and political enterprises were not normative or even common among the vast majority of immigrants, nor were they undergirded by the thick web of regular instantaneous communication and easy personal travel that we encounter today'.⁷ These claims overlook much of the historical record and scholarship on migration to the Americas, however. The fabled *golondrinas*, for instance, travelled back and forth working the harvest seasons in Italy and Argentina prior to the First World War. These sojourners utilised rapid transportation and instantaneous communication links to facilitate repeat migrations and constant contact with family and friends.⁸

This study contributes to the body of scholarship on immigrants in Argentina and the Arabic-speaking communities in the Americas by examining how transnational processes affected émigrés and their identities while attempting to situate this story within its larger global context.⁹ The bulk of studies examining migrants in Latin America have focused on Europeans, and have enriched our understanding of these migrants' important roles in labour issues, national politics and the politics of belonging. This emphasis, however, has led scholars to neglect the influential role that Arabic-speakers played in the formation of modern Argentina and their homelands, and how concerns with both affected the development and maintenance of an organised immigrant colony. Yet, the effort by scholars of Levantine migrants to show the successful integration by a supposedly unwanted immigrant group has come at the expense of studying the internal discussions, debates and political considerations that influenced the shape of the community. As a result, a fuller picture of this group of people and how homeland politics and local considerations intersected in their lives is still lacking. This essay attempts

(Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994), p. 4. See also John Lie, 'From International Migration to Transnational Diaspora', *Contemporary Sociology*, 24: 4 (1995), pp. 303–6; and Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 'From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration', *Anthropology Quarterly*, 68: 1 (1995), pp. 48–64.

⁷ Alejandro Portes, Luis E. Guarnizo and Patricia Landolt, 'The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22: 2 (1999), p. 227.

⁸ Carl E. Solberg, *The Prairies and the Pampas: Agrarian Policy in Canada and Argentina, 1880–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 95–6. See also José C. Moya, 'A Continent of Immigrants: Postcolonial Shifts in the Western Hemisphere', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 86: 1 (2006), pp. 1–23.

⁹ Samuel Baily has laid out these issues for consideration by immigration scholars. He has also called for research on the issues of race and discrimination, including the reasons for nativism, how immigrants interact with internal migrants and minority communities, and immigrant participation in host society politics: Samuel Baily, 'Conclusion: Common Themes and Future Directions', in Baily and Míguez (eds.), *Mass Migration*, pp. 284–7.

to build upon an observation by Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein critiquing the monolithic presentation of immigrant communities and ethnic groups. As they note, 'examining ethnic groups *grosso modo* ignores intra ethnic divisions that are often replicated over many generations'.¹⁰ In the case of the Syrian colony, the formation of politicised ethno-regional and racialised identities was extremely sensitive to political processes in the homeland, and ultimately forced the refashioning of the community and the expulsion of certain members.

The Ottoman Empire and Syrian Emigration

The Ottoman Empire governed a vast territory stretching west to the Balkans and Algeria, south to Yemen and east to Basra, and included diverse religious, linguistic and cultural communities. During the nineteenth century the Ottoman government initiated a series of reforms, known collectively as the *Tanzimat*, attempting to modernise the bureaucracy, military and polity of the empire while protecting its territorial integrity. In the 1860s a collection of intellectuals coalesced to create the first modern-style opposition movement. Though really a cultural movement, these so-called 'Young Ottomans' founded newspapers to disseminate their ideas, and their efforts helped in the promulgation of a Constitution in 1876 and the election of the empire's first parliament. While these reforms were being pursued and implemented, the Ottomans suffered a series of military defeats that sliced off large portions of territory and produced thousands of war refugees. The Crimean War (1853), the Russo-Turkish War (1877–8) and the Balkan Wars (1912–13) led to a flood of refugees and the permanent loss of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro. These external conflicts coincided with a series of internal crises as Sultan °Abd al-Hamid II suspended the Constitution in 1878, initiating a 30-year period of autocratic rule. The government in Istanbul dealt with famine in Anatolia, lawless Kurdish horsemen, Armenian nationalists and riots in Mount Lebanon (1860) that led to direct intervention by European powers and an increase in Christian missionaries.¹¹ Over time a loose group of dissidents based in the empire and in Western Europe formed secret societies. Military members of one secret society, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), revolted against °Abd al-Hamid in July 1908, sparking what is commonly known as the Young Turk Revolution. The result was the restoration of the Constitution and the transformation of the empire into a

¹⁰ Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, 'Challenging Particularity: Jews as a Lens on Latin American Ethnicity', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 1: 2 (2006), p. 258.

¹¹ Carter V. Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789–2007* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 76–132; Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 28–95.

constitutional monarchy. The CUP initiated a series of reforms aimed at preserving the Ottoman imperial superstructure and integrating all sectors of society based upon loyalty to the state. However, the onset of the First World War and the decision to join Germany in a defence pact against Russia (2 August 1914) unleashed a series of events that led to the collapse of the empire.¹²

While leaders in Istanbul contended with these issues, emigration from Greater Syria increased in intensity. The general expansion of the regional economy and the dissemination of liberal ideology regarding freedom of movement spurred this traffic. The Ottoman provinces of Damascus and Aleppo experienced a period of economic growth from 1880 to 1910. Greater agricultural production, the expansion of the railway and increased security in rural areas all had positive effects on a burgeoning industrial sector, primarily in textiles, which targeted new urban and rural markets around Greater Syria.¹³ Growing prosperity from the silk industry in Mount Lebanon accustomed the local population to certain living standards but also increased the price of land, preventing many inhabitants from purchasing land or expanding their holdings.¹⁴ Despite competition from the East Asian silk market, local silk production expanded in the 1890s and achieved its greatest output, in terms both of bales exported and the value of exports, between 1903 and 1907. The increasing wealth generated by the silk industry, along with a sliding level of profitability and the social transformations that the industry caused, provided the impetus and opportunity for emigration.¹⁵ The *Règlement Organique* of 1861, passed in the wake of the 1860 riots, established a governorship which encompassed all of Mount Lebanon, excluding the coastal cities of Beirut and Tripoli. In addition, the *Règlement* guaranteed freedom of movement, breaking peasants' historical binds to the *shuyūkh* or local secular lords, and coincided with an increase in schools run by Christian missionaries offering secular education.¹⁶ This notion of uninhibited passage had filtered into popular culture by the period of intense emigration, creating 'venues of social and physical movement within and out of the country'.¹⁷ While the average peasant was neither rich nor destitute, land prices, limited employment opportunities and the understanding that

¹² Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*, pp. 133–246.

¹³ Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800–1914* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1981), pp. 244–9, 261–2.

¹⁴ Khater, *Inventing Home*, pp. 48–52, 60.

¹⁵ Owen, *The Middle East*, pp. 249–53; Kohei Hashimoto, 'Silk, Information and Migrants: The Causes of the Lebanese Migration Reconsidered', *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies*, 8 (1993), p. 12.

¹⁶ A *shaykh* (pl. *shuyūkh*) was a local leader who had earned social prestige and power through economic success: see Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, pp. 34–45.

¹⁷ Khater, *Inventing Home*, pp. 52–55. See also Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, pp. 18–25.

emigration was a viable option generated this movement.¹⁸ By 1914, between 450,000 and 600,000 people from Greater Syria had migrated into the Americas, with more than 100,000 hailing from Mount Lebanon. After the United States, Argentina was the most popular destination.¹⁹

Emigration to Argentina mirrored the confessional and regional diversity of Greater Syria; Arabic-speaking Christians, Jews and Muslims had all left from Damascus, Beirut, Homs, Hama and Aleppo and their hinterlands, and settled in Buenos Aires, Tucumán and other provinces and territories by 1914. The Christians were largely Maronite Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Armenian Catholics. Jews came primarily from Damascus, Aleppo and even Jerusalem. Although Sunnis and ^cAlawites were most prominent in Tucumán, the diverse Muslim community in Argentina also consisted of Shiites, Druze, and Isma^cilis.²⁰

Argentina and the Emergence of a Syrian Colony

In the 20 years before the First World War Argentina experienced spectacular if uneven growth led by the agricultural sector, alongside infrastructure modernisation and broader economic expansion. With the massive extension of the railways Argentina became a major exporter of grains and beef, complementing and becoming increasingly dependent upon the economies of industrialised countries in Western Europe. Tucumán's sugar industry, the largest in Argentina, serviced the domestic market and also experienced periodic expansion, tripling production between 1895 and 1914.²¹ The country's population doubled to nearly 7.8 million between 1895 and 1914, 30 per cent of them foreign-born. Within this flood of immigrants, over 100,000 Arabic-speaking persons with Ottoman citizenship had arrived in Argentina by 1915. Nearly half settled in the capital city and province of Buenos Aires.

¹⁸ Khater, *Inventing Home*, pp. 60–1.

¹⁹ See Arthur Ruppin, *Syria: An Economic Survey* (New York: The Provisional Zionist Committee, 1918), p. 6; Charles Issawi, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 20; Kemal H. Karpat, 'The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860–1914', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 17: 2 (1985), p. 185.

²⁰ See Gladys Jozami, 'Identidad religiosa e integración cultural en cristianos sirios y libaneses en Argentina, 1890–1990', *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, 9: 26 (1994), pp. 95–113; Raymond Delval, *Les musulmans en Amérique latine et aux Caraïbes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), pp. 262–9.

²¹ Roberto Cortés Conde, *The Political Economy of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 14–77, 319; Carlos Díaz Alejandro, *Essays on the Economic History of the Argentine Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 1–66; Bill Albert, *South America and the First World War: The Impact of the War on Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Chile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 11–17; *Anuario de estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1915* (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1916), pp. cxvi–cxvii.

More than 18,000 Syrians followed the extension of the railway network and settled in the north-western provinces, with Tucumán being the most popular.²²

Argentines struggled to cope with the influx of people and the attendant problems associated with the process of modernisation, such as worker unrest, rising crime rates, unstable housing arrangements and fragile labour markets.²³ An anti-immigrant sentiment thus emerged in Argentina during the late 1880s as a response to the economic crash, massive immigration and urban unrest, and intensified during the first two decades of the twentieth century.²⁴ As the government of Miguel Juárez Celman sold state assets to service the public debt in late 1889 and early 1890, unemployment grew and real wages depreciated, with the result that new immigrants became a cause of worry for civic groups, newspapers and political leaders. Concerned citizens criticised federal immigration policy, questioning whether or not the immigrants' idiosyncrasies and customs could help Argentina's progress directly or transform these people into citizens of a modern nation. The financial and commercial breakdown coupled with dissension among the political elites led to the abortive 1890 revolution and the ultimate fall of the Juárez Celman government.²⁵

The first Argentine elite perceptions of the Syrian colony emerged in the press during this era of socio-economic distress and political turbulence. Two negative stereotypes about the Syrian colony materialised in local Argentine society, namely the *mercachifle*, or wandering pedlar, and the mendicant. An Argentine newspaper, *El Diario*, ran a series of critical articles in 1889 examining the phenomenon of Syrian immigration and its perceived languid nature.²⁶ The perception of the ubiquitous Syrian itinerant pedlar captivated the Argentine imagination, and the press often called for restrictions on Syrian

²² Alejandro Chamún, *La Siria nueva: obra histórica, estadística y comercial de la colectividad sirio-otomana en las Repúblicas Argentina y Uruguay* (Buenos Aires: Empresa Assalam, 1917), p. 30.

²³ See Julia Kirk Blackwelder and Lyman L. Johnson, 'Changing Criminal Patterns in Buenos Aires, 1890-1914', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 14: 2 (1982), pp. 359-79; Lyman L. Johnson, 'Changing Arrest Patterns in Three Argentine Cities: Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, and Tucumán, 1900-1930', in Johnson (ed.), *The Problem of Order in Changing Societies: Essays on Crime and Policing in Argentina and Uruguay* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), pp. 117-47.

²⁴ A classic account is Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism: Argentina and Chile, 1890-1914* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1970). See also Civantos, *Between Arab and Argentine*, pp. 8-16.

²⁵ Liliana Ana Bertoni, 'De Turquía a Buenos Aires: una colectividad nueva a fines del siglo XIX', *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, 9: 26 (1994), p. 68; David Rock, *State Building and Political Movements in Argentina, 1860-1916* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 116-43.

²⁶ Bertoni, 'De Turquía a Buenos Aires', p. 69.

immigration.²⁷ In 1902, the Buenos Aires weekly *Caras y Caretas* published a feature on the Syrians, arguing that they were an 'irritant' offering 'detrimental examples for a working people'.²⁸ The local press in Salta also criticised Syrian hawkers and small shopkeepers, declaring: 'A plague of Turkish pedlars has appeared, worse than if they were locusts. The police must prevent them from continuing to commit such abuse'.²⁹ As the size of the colony in Argentina swelled, the local political elite began to comment on society in general and the Arabic-speaking community in particular. For instance, Juan B. Alsina, the director of the Dirección de Inmigración (Directorate of Immigration), wrote in the department's 1899 *Memoria*, or annual report, that the Syrian immigrants had 'no respect for the law' and 'belonged to their country's lower classes', and that their common practice of itinerant peddling filled 'no need for exchange'.³⁰ In 1911, a scandal in Tucumán featuring Syrian immigrants committing fraudulent bankruptcies produced intense public scrutiny, a criminal conviction and the need for Alejandro Schamún, a prominent Syrian intellectual living in Buenos Aires, to publish an article in the local newspaper defending the colony.³¹ Despite prejudicial discourses and occasional public outrage, the Syrian colony did have important supporters – these included Minister of Agriculture Damián Torino and Senator Joaquín V. González.³²

Commentary by Alsina and others led to a programme in 1903 – spearheaded by Wadi and Alejandro Schamún, publishers of the periodical *al-Salām (Peace)* – aimed at drafting recent arrivals from Greater Syria to work on an agricultural colony in Santa Fe province, an effort that continued for a decade and was appreciated by local politicians and observers.³³ This was an attempt to mollify public and government opinion, which had

²⁷ Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*, p. 89.

²⁸ 'Los turcos en Buenos Aires', *Caras y Caretas*, 1 March 1902. *Caras y Caretas* was aimed at a readership among the burgeoning middle class of Buenos Aires.

²⁹ Cited in James R. Scobie, *Secondary Cities of Argentina: The Social History of Corrientes, Salta, and Mendoza, 1850–1910* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 150.

³⁰ Juan Alsina, *Memoria de la Dirección de Inmigración correspondiente al año 1899* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Guillermo Kraft, 1900), pp. 79–80. See also María Elena Vela Ríos and Roberto Caimi, 'The Arabs in Tucumán, Argentina', in Luz M. Martínez Montiel (ed.), *Asiatic Migrations in Latin America* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1981), pp. 129–30.

³¹ See the series of articles entitled 'Quiebras fraudulentas', in *El Orden*, 13, 15, 16 and 18 March 1911; for Schamún's article, see 'La colectividad siria en la República Argentina', *El Orden*, 21 March 1911. See also 'Amado Caram y hermanos: su quiebra', Archivo del Poder Judicial de la Provincia de Tucumán, Juzgado del Crimen, Sentencias, 1912–15, pp. 155–74.

³² Damián M. Torino, *El problema del inmigrante y el problema agrario en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de La Baskonia, 1912), pp. 31–2; Congreso Nacional, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores, año 1911*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: El Comercio, 1912), pp. 530–4.

³³ 'Los árabes en la República', *La Prensa*, 17 Nov. 1906; 'La colectividad siria en la República', *La Prensa*, 10 May 1907; Governor José Inocencio Arias (Buenos Aires Province) to Alejandro Schamún, 29 July 1912. A facsimile of the Arias letter recognising the efforts to steer Syrian immigrants into the agricultural sector can be found in Abdeluahed Akmir, 'La

identified the link between 'agricultural and demographic development' since the 1820s.³⁴ Moving more Arabic-speakers into the agricultural sector was also a primary task for the newly arrived Ottoman consul-general in late 1910.³⁵ This strategy corresponded with the agricultural boom that Argentina experienced after it had renegotiated debt repayment with Baring Brothers in 1893. By 1909 only 5,300 Arabic-speaking immigrants, or roughly 10 per cent of the community, worked in the agricultural sector, increasing to 12,000 in 1917.³⁶ While there was an anti-immigrant discourse circulating throughout Argentina, it is clear that Syrians adjusted to local labour markets and economic niches while utilising Argentine state institutions to pursue their rights and protect their interests. Elite members of the Syrian colony made connections with the Argentine political class and social institutions.³⁷

The initial Syrian immigrants in Buenos Aires overwhelmingly practised commerce, some 85 per cent doing so in 1895, as did their compatriots in north-western Argentina.³⁸ The existing economic opportunities and legal rights protecting immigrant trade activities enshrined in the 1853 Constitution attracted many Syrians. Little had changed in terms of career vocation by 1909, when two out of every three Arabic-speakers in Argentina engaged in commerce, with pedlars accounting for more than 50 per cent of the merchants.³⁹ As Akram Khater has noted, the choice of earning money quickly meant that most immigrants had to choose between commerce and factory work. Peddling required little start-up capital, preparation or ability, and as a result commerce became a characteristic feature of the Arabic-speaking immigrant experience throughout the Americas.⁴⁰ The profession also fitted a niche in certain regions, such as Brazil, Mexico and Honduras, where the commercial sector was underdeveloped and new patterns of consumption were emerging.⁴¹

inmigración árabe en Argentina (1880–1980)', unpubl. PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1991, p. 837.

³⁴ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, pp. 48–53.

³⁵ 'Arribo del Cónsul Otomano', *La Nación*, 30 Oct. 1910; 'Colonia agrícola turca', *La Nación*, 15 Feb. 1913.

³⁶ Alejandro Schamún, *La colectividad siria en la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Establecimiento Tipográfico Santa Fe 500, 1910), p. 12; Schamún, *La Siria nueva*, p. 29.

³⁷ For instance, María Miguel de Torbai won a judgment from the Buenos Aires high court in 1890 confirming her right to practice commerce in Buenos Aires: 'Miguel de Torbai sobre venia supletoria', Archivo General de la Nación, Tribunal Civil, legajo M, no. 70, 1890.

³⁸ Bertoni, 'De Turquía a Buenos Aires', pp. 80–1.

³⁹ Schamún, *La colectividad siria*, p. 12. ⁴⁰ Khater, *Inventing Home*, pp. 74–5.

⁴¹ Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah*, pp. 29–30; Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity*, pp. 50–1; González, *Dollar, Dove, and Eagle*, pp. 70–1, 81–2.

The number of Syrians residing in Buenos Aires quadrupled from 3,898 to 15,791 between 1909 and 1914.⁴² This surge in Arabic-speaking immigrants, which followed the 1908 Young Turk Revolution and the establishment of consular relations between Argentina and the Ottoman Empire in 1910, changed the contours of the colony's labour force. Although the number of pedlars remained constant, they became a smaller percentage of the workforce as the quantity of general labourers doubled.⁴³ Furthermore, the sharp increase in the size of this immigrant community led to concentrations in certain wards in the capital, such as a noticeable slum in the downtown Socorro district, as well as dispersal into outlying areas. Nearly one-third of the Syrians residing in Buenos Aires lived in the southern and south-western districts, where factories, distilleries, meat-packing plants and various other industries dotted the urban landscape and provided some opportunity for employment.⁴⁴ At the same time, the composition of the colony began to shift. The first consul-general of the Ottoman Empire in Buenos Aires, Emir Emin Arslan, reported in 1910 that 80 per cent of the Syrian community were Christians, 15 per cent were Muslims, and 5 per cent were Jews.⁴⁵ In the years leading up to the First World War, Muslims represented roughly 40 per cent of emigrants departing from Tripoli (Beirut province), and in 1913 they accounted for 35 per cent of emigrants leaving the Governorate of Jerusalem.⁴⁶ In Buenos Aires, Muslims made up 40 per cent of the immigrants coming from Greater Syria as early as 1909, and this led to the establishment of the Islamic Society in 1910.⁴⁷ Migration from Greater Syria had become a 'widespread fever, a massive habit', which led to more arrivals per annum with weaker social networks, helping to solidify a multi-class structure among Buenos Aires' Syrian colony.⁴⁸

⁴² *Censo general de población, edificación, comercio é industrias de la ciudad de Buenos Aires*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1910), p. 17; *Tercer censo nacional levantado el 1 de Junio de 1914*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de L. J. Rosso y Cía, 1916), p. 148.

⁴³ Schamún, *La colectividad siria*, p. 12; Schamún, *La Siria nueva*, p. 29. Sofia Martos has determined that 40 per cent of Arabic-speaking immigrants who arrived between 1882 and 1929 were classified as day labourers, whereas only 11 per cent were registered as merchants: see Sofia D. Martos, 'The Balancing Act: Ethnicity, Commerce, and Politics among Syrian and Lebanese Immigrants in Argentina, 1890-1955', unpubl. PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2007, pp. 68-70.

⁴⁴ *Tercer censo nacional*, vol. 2, pp. 129-49; Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, pp. 155-8, 170.

⁴⁵ Raymond Delval, *Les Musulmanes en Amérique Latine et aux Caraïbes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), p. 262.

⁴⁶ Arthur Ruppin, *Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebeit* (Berlin: Verlag Benjamin Harz, 1920), pp. 22-6.

⁴⁷ Karpat, 'Ottoman Emigration to America', p. 199.

⁴⁸ José Moya notes the same phenomenon among emigrants from Spain. He writes, 'The social composition of the flow varied according to the stages of its growth curve, with the early phase in the curve containing a disproportionate number of better off or more skilled people': see Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, pp. 230-2.

The colony's development in Tucumán was directly linked to the emergence of a merchant elite in the provincial capital of San Miguel. The earliest Syrians there settled along Calle Maipú, an area several blocks to the north-west of the central plaza. Over time this area evolved into the heart of the colony as Arabic-speakers founded churches, set up businesses and occupied tenements, but the community failed to establish any lasting, broad-based social institutions. The colony suffered from intense personal rivalries among its leading merchants, dividing the immigrant elites, overwhelming the arbitration mechanisms inherent in micro-social networks and provoking the utilisation of Argentine state institutions to seek redress.⁴⁹ Massive immigration of Syrians into Tucumán overwhelmed established social networks that could have absorbed the new arrivals and facilitated adaptation. The Syrian population in San Miguel de Tucumán also quadrupled between 1909 and 1914 to 2,064, and tripled across the province in the same period to 4,155.⁵⁰ At the same time, recurrent crises in the sugar-based regional economy adversely affected seasonal labour, and jobs became scarce. As a result, a multi-class social structure solidified, and Syrians possessing weaker social networks and working as unskilled and menial labour found themselves more susceptible to the ebbs and flows of the regional economy.

In 1913 over half of the Syrian labour force in Tucumán worked in the commercial sector, principally as merchants and itinerant pedlars, Syrians being more than eight times more likely to be pedlars than the average immigrant. Some worked as clerks for businesses or employees at state institutions such as the local police force. One-third worked in unskilled and menial labour, including Arabic-speaking women who worked as washerwomen, clothes-ironers and domestic servants. Interestingly, Syrians were more than three times as likely as the average immigrant to be bakers, suggesting access to capital beyond the realm of dry goods commerce. In comparison to other immigrants, Syrians were under-represented as day labourers, shoemakers and carpenters, but were five times more likely to be shoe-shiners.⁵¹ Arabic-speaking immigrants also were over-represented in the arrest rates for felony crimes. Between 1907 and 1925 Syrians were more than three times as likely to be arrested for aggravated assault as Spaniards, and more than twice as likely as Italians. They were three times as likely as Spaniards and nearly four times more likely than Italians to be arrested for larceny. A portion of the arrests may be a result of targeting by local police forces, but this cannot

⁴⁹ See 'Kairuz, Amado i otros – Injurias a Manuel Malcún', Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Tucumán, caja 220, exp. 13, 18 June 1898.

⁵⁰ *Anuario de estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán correspondiente al año de 1909* (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1911), p. 108; *Tercer censo nacional*, vol. 2, p. 303; *Censo de la Capital de Tucumán (República Argentina), 1913* (Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1914), pp. 40–7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

be the sole causative factor. It is probable that recent arrivals with a poor understanding of Spanish who were peddling or looking for work in the cane fields found themselves in dangerous situations that led to violent altercations; furthermore, high rates of larceny, which suggest a sense of desperation, are likely linked to poverty and a need to survive.⁵²

The Role of the Syrian Cultural Elite

As the Syrian colony grew, a discernable cultural elite emerged within the communities. These intellectuals in Buenos Aires and Tucumán viewed themselves as part of their homeland's political life and dialogued and debated with their peers in the Americas, Europe and the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire. Many worked as merchants; these individuals were often recognised for their oral poetics, and also published or contributed to Arabic-language periodicals. Only a very few worked solely as journalists.⁵³ At the same time, Arabic-speakers in Argentina were certainly influenced by local political arrangements and the national culture within which they lived.⁵⁴ The excitement surrounding Argentina's centenary, for instance, figured into the Syrian immigrant communities' embrace of constitutional rule. Alejandro Schamún, editor of the Arabic periodical *al-Salām*, received a letter from an iconic Socialist deputy, Alfredo Palacios, declaring, 'Liberty is not granted, it must be won', in celebration of the first anniversary of the Young Turk Revolution.⁵⁵ A delegation of immigrants from Tucumán, led by a Syrian, participated in the installation of the statue of Argentina's revolutionary hero, Martín Güemes, in the neighbouring province of Salta; the event was held on

⁵² The data for creating probability tables was taken from the *Anuario de estadística de la Provincia de Tucumán*. Only the years 1917 and 1921 are missing from the source data. I used the 1914 national census population figures as a constant in figuring the results.

⁵³ The term used by Syrian intellectuals to address themselves and their peers was *adīb* (pl. *udabāʾ*), an Arabic term denoting a cultured person as well as a man of letters. Many of these elites were well educated, some even graduating from university, but this was not necessarily a requirement for recognition as such: see Jūrj Ṣaydah, *Adabunā wa udabāʾ unā fi al-Mahājir al-Amirikīya* (4th edition, Tripoli: Maktabat al-Saʿih, 1999), pp. 457–507.

⁵⁴ Lesser and Rein have called for a more sensitive approach to studying ethnic minorities and immigrant communities in Latin America: see Lesser and Rein, 'Challenging Particularity', pp. 249–63. In particular, they challenge approaches that assert that immigrants lived apart from or were victims of the host society's national culture. While I recognise the influence of local Argentine society on the Syrian colonies, the emphasis of this essay remains the consequential impact of political transformations taking place in the Ottoman Empire, the circulating nationalisms that existed at the time, and how these processes affected Syrian immigrants.

⁵⁵ For a facsimile of the July 1909 note to Schamún, see Akmir, 'La inmigración árabe en Argentina', p. 820.

9 July 1916, marking the centenary of the declaration of independence by the United Provinces of South America.⁵⁶

While the size of the Syrian colonies in Buenos Aires and Tucumán grew considerably in the years before the First World War, these immigrants were unable to organise enduring pan-Syrian (or pan-Arab) institutions servicing the broadest sectors of the group. In their place were religious institutions such as the Maronite churches in Buenos Aires (1901) and Tucumán (1910), the Greek Orthodox church in Santiago del Estero (1914), the Islamic Society (1910), and burial societies for Sephardic Jews from Damascus (1913) and Aleppo (1923). Ephemeral social and political organisations such as the Sociedad Juventud Otomana (Ottoman Youth Society), established in 1909, and the Union Libanesa (Lebanese Union), founded in 1915, also appeared. Yet, in spite of this inability to form broad-based social institutions, a vibrant press materialised and was critical in the creation of the *mahjar*.⁵⁷ The Arabic-language press produced in the Americas indicated that these immigrants considered themselves part of their homeland at every level – politically, socially and economically. Intellectuals who published newspapers in Argentina were part of a larger ‘arabophone Republic of Letters’ and viewed themselves as agents of social and political change, corresponding with the larger *nahda*, or cultural renaissance, in the homeland that had begun in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸

These publications were usually in Arabic, possessed particular political orientations, competed against other publications for the mantle of community spokesperson, and were for the most part ephemeral.⁵⁹ Periodicals presented news about the homeland, usually in the form of letters from

⁵⁶ ‘Sr. Nagib Baacini: su fallecimiento’, *La Gaceta*, 23 Oct. 1963.

⁵⁷ Mahjar, in Arabic, is a noun of place that means ‘land of emigration’, and was at once a particular locale and a shared imagined space that connected Arabic-speakers residing in various places, such as Tucumán, Dakar, New York and Rio de Janeiro, and linked them back to their compatriots who remained in the old country. In contrast to Anderson’s focus on the nation and its territoriality, it is significant that print capitalism, for those in the mahjar, would be the driving force for creating a shared sense of connectivity across continents as well as competing nationalisms that emerged towards the end of the First World War: see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 43–5; Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, pp. 81–112.

⁵⁸ ‘Republic of Letters’ is a term from the Enlightenment that may be defined as ‘a community of discourse about the whole range of knowledge possible to human reason [that] thus transcends the boundaries of genre’: see Frank Shuffleton, ‘In Different Voices: Gender in the American Republic of Letters’, *Early American Literature*, 25: 3 (1990), p. 289.

⁵⁹ There were notable exceptions, such as *al-Salām* (1902–73), *Şada al-Sharq* (1917–52), *al-Jarida al-Sūriyya al-Lubnāniyya* (1929–60) and *al-Mursal* (1913–40). *Şada al-Sharq* was the first newspaper to be fully bilingual in Arabic and Spanish: see Abdeluahed Akmir, ‘La prensa árabe en Argentina’, in *Huellas comunes y miradas cruzadas: mundos árabe, ibérico e iberoamericano* (Rabat, Morocco: Universidad Mohamed V, 1995), pp. 291–305.

correspondents, information received from recent arrivals and letters from family members. These publications, most of which were only four pages long, also provided news about the issues faced, successes achieved and tragedies suffered by immigrants in Argentina, reflecting 'faithfully the life, aspirations and values of the Arab community' in Argentina.⁶⁰ The Arabic press was effusive in praising the generosity of Argentina, marvelling at the country's wealth and celebrating the freedoms experienced there by immigrants.⁶¹ Hence, Arabic-language newspapers published in the mahjar are invaluable sources for assessing the state of immigrant community life, the affairs circulating within it, competing concerns regarding the politics of the homeland, and what the intellectuals believed were the responsibilities of immigrants to the host society.

Before the First World War, the émigrés, especially those who published newspapers, formulated a Syrian identity as the hegemonic Arabic-speaking immigrant group in Argentina and the rest of the Americas.⁶² The creation of this identity took place in dialogue with intellectuals who were based in Beirut, Cairo and Damascus. In the critical years after 1908 Levantine newspapers disseminated competing nationalist ideas to readers, including the mahjar.⁶³ It was these ideas and debates that also animated the Arabic press in Argentina and elsewhere. Syrian immigrants in Argentina were an important part of this discussion, yet there has been scant scholarship examining the intersection of transnational ideological currents that influenced their political dispositions and modes of participation with local particularities such as democratic governance and economic opportunity in Argentina.

Transnational Politics and the Syrian Colonies

As the Syrian colonies negotiated the realities of living in Argentina, they also had to contend with intense political transformations in the old country.⁶⁴ Settled immigrants in the Argentine mahjar had petitioned the Ottoman state to establish diplomatic relations with Buenos Aires since 1890, even sending a delegation of émigrés living in Buenos Aires who met with Sultan 'Abd

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² For North America, see Khater, *Inventing Home*, pp. 71–107; and Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, pp. 81–112.

⁶³ Eliezer Tauber, 'The Press and the Journalist as a Vehicle in Spreading National Ideas in Syria in the Late Ottoman Period', *Die Welt des Islams*, 30: 1/4 (1990), pp. 163–77.

⁶⁴ Samuel Baily and José Moya have briefly discussed the role of homeland politics in regard to the Italian and Spanish communities, arguing that neither group was overwhelmed in forming community institutions. In a separate work, Baily and Ramella excised the portion of letters dealing with politics in Italy, saying they were of minor importance: Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise*, pp. 173–81; Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, pp. 318–27; Baily and Ramella, *One Family, Two Worlds*, pp. 1–23.

al-Hamid II in Istanbul.⁶⁵ The Arabic-speaking communities in the Americas possessed 'close and friendly contact' with Istanbul in spite of pockets of political dissidence within them.⁶⁶ Before the outbreak of the First World War the Syrian colony shared an Ottoman political identity which acted as a unifying factor across broad sections of this immigrant group and demonstrated widespread loyalty to the Ottoman state through expressive culture and public celebrations. Similar sentiments emerged among Syrians in the United States and Venezuela.⁶⁷

Arabic-speakers in Argentina organised large public events and published several periodicals that pledged and celebrated their loyalty to the Ottoman state, especially in the wake of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. The restoration of the Ottoman Constitution and the return to democratic governance provided a heady elixir of communal identification and a source of pride that was commemorated by the Syrian colonies throughout Argentina. For instance, the Comisión Sirio-Otomana (Syrian–Ottoman Commission) organised a mass patriotic event held on 8 September 1908 in the Casa Suiza, located in the capital of Buenos Aires, honouring the July revolution. The organisers published a poster in local periodicals that featured the Ottoman coat of arms and images of five key figures of Ottoman socio-political life: the Young Ottoman author and thinker Namık Kemal Bey (1840–88); the financier of the Young Ottoman Party, Mustafa Fazıl Paşa (1829–75); Sultan °Abd al-Hamid II (1842–1918); one of the authors of the 1876 Ottoman Constitution, Midhat Paşa (1822–84); and the director of *Meschveret*, the organ of the Young Turk Party, Ahmed Rıza (1858–1930). These leaders did not represent the Young Turk movement (save Ahmed Rıza), nor did they come from the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire, but Syrians in Argentina identified them in some way with the return to democracy. The symbols were uniquely Ottoman, as opposed to Arab, Syrian or Lebanese. In consequence the Syrian immigrants were not yet well informed about the events unfolding in Istanbul, as they conflated members of the Young Ottoman movement with the Young Turks and incorrectly recognised Sultan °Abd al-Hamid's role in restoring the Constitution.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ 'Arribo del cónsul otomano', *La Nación*, 30 Oct. 1910; 'Los Turcos en Buenos Aires', *Caras y Caretas*, 1 March 1902. ⁶⁶ Karpat, 'The Ottoman Emigration to America', p. 193.

⁶⁷ Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, p. 83; Mehmet Necati Kutlu, 'Ottoman Subjects in Latin America: An Archive Document and Some Reflections on the Probable Causes of their Immigration', *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 25 (2008), pp. 233–44.

⁶⁸ Carter Findley notes similar confusion throughout the empire in the wake of the promulgation of the Ottoman Constitution. Press censorship prevented the dissemination of accurate information surrounding the events of July 1908 and actually made the revolution far more of a surprise than it would have been otherwise: see Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*, pp. 160–5.

On the day of the 8 September event, the Liga Albanesa (Albanian League) held a public demonstration commemorating the 'transcendental resolution' of Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid II. That night the Syrian colony's most distinguished members celebrated with its most humble ones beneath Ottoman flags and Chinese lanterns; many families congregated in the elevated theatre boxes in the Casa Suiza. In the hallway and reception room, 'trophies and emblems highlighted the crescent moon and the Turkish national colours'. On the proscenium, an ensemble of girls, one portraying Liberty, performed. To the right stood a portrait of Midhat Paşa, the 'glorious martyr and source of inspiration of the Constitution of 1876'.⁶⁹ The event commenced with a rendition of the Argentine national hymn, which was followed by the Ottoman anthem.⁷⁰

Leading members of the Syrian colony gave speeches lauding the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire, newly incorporated into the world of free societies. They remembered the 'martyrs who gave their blood for the liberty of Turkey and honoured the memory of Midhat Paşa', and recognised, among the 'current and most brilliant leaders of the Young Turks', Prince Sabahaddin. In addition the orators saluted the generosity of Argentina, a country 'that countenances sustained battles for giving liberty to other people, whose aurora glows finally on their distant homeland'. In an impromptu act, a celebrant gave a 'vibrant speech' from a chair in the middle of the crowd.⁷¹ The following July the Syrians in Buenos Aires organised a massive celebration at the Coliseo Argentino, one of the capital's premier theatres, to mark the first anniversary of the Constitution's restoration. At the festivities 'more than 4,000 Syrians were congregated on a memorable night to applaud in every tone the happy event that came to transform the socio-political life of the Turkish nation'.⁷²

The outburst of Ottoman national pride could be seen far beyond Buenos Aires. Elias Turbay, a merchant based Tucumán, composed a poem, entitled 'How Beautiful Freedom Is and the Constitutional State', praising Midhat Paşa and Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid II.⁷³ The Syrian colony in Salta, a province just north of Tucumán, held a banquet in October 1908 celebrating the

⁶⁹ Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamid II had Midhat Paşa killed in Ta'if, a town near Mecca, in 1884 while in exile: see Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 24.

⁷⁰ 'La constitución otomana', *La Nación*, 9 Sep. 1908.

⁷¹ 'La constitución otomana', *La Nación*, 9 Sep. 1908. The orators were Antonio Arida (president of the Commission), Jacobo Suaya, Felipe Omad, Jorge Assaf, Wadi Schamún (editor of *al-Salām*), Elias Homaine, Hafez Tarazi, Labid Riache and Alejandro Schamún (director of *al-Salām*).
⁷² Schamún, *La Siria nueva*, p. 81.

⁷³ Elias Turbay, *al-Manzumāt al-Durriyya* (Tucumán: Matba' Jarīdat al-Waṭan, 1917), p. 120. In the nine years that passed between the composing of the poem and its publication in the book, Turbay had completed an about-face in terms of political allegiance, and he included a clarification in the poem's introduction.

restoration of the Constitution. The event was held in the exclusive Club 20 de Febrero, suggesting a measure of communal organisation and acceptance on the part of local *salteño* society.⁷⁴ In 1913, Nagib Baaclini (a merchant in San Miguel de Tucumán), Elias Turbay and Simón Hamati (who had recently arrived in Tucumán from Buenos Aires) established a periodical, *al-Fatā Suriyya* (*Young Syria*), ‘on the occasion of the Ottoman Constitution’.⁷⁵

In spite of these celebrations, anti-Ottoman movements formed throughout Syrian émigré communities around the world. In early 1909 the Paris-based Syrian Society, founded by Nakhla Pasha Mutran and his brother Rashid Bey Mutran, announced the formation of the Arab Society in Argentina, which advocated Syrian independence and separation from the Ottoman Empire. On 30 March 1909 a Buenos Aires-based Arabic-language newspaper, *al-Zamān*, published by Miguel and Naguib Samra, printed a letter to the president of the Ottoman parliament entitled ‘Protest from the Syrian Émigrés in Argentina against the “Syrian Society” in the City of Paris’, eviscerating the claims of this organisation.⁷⁶ The letter announced that Syrians and émigrés in Argentina declared their ‘genuine loyal attachment and authentic fidelity to the Constitution and the unshakeable Ottoman unity, as ... we witnessed in the public demonstration we organised to celebrate it’.⁷⁷ In addition, the protest made six proclamations. First, despite the claims of Pasha Mutran and the Syrian Society, the colony had never heard of Pasha Mutran having a party or a following in Argentina. Second, the only society that the colony in Argentina knew and cared to know was the Free Constitutional Ottoman Society. Third, the community in Argentina stood ready to resist physically those who slandered the Ottoman state or continued to advocate the division of the country along ethno-national lines. Fourth, Syrians in Argentina, regardless of creed, informed the Ottoman society that they did not challenge its firm hope for the empire. Fifth, they requested that

⁷⁴ James Scobie, *Secondary Cities of Argentina*, p. 151. Scobie incorrectly states that the celebration commemorated the independence of the Republic of Turkey.

⁷⁵ Mario Gómez, *Tucumán: sus Bellezas y sus Personalidades* (Buenos Aires: Federación Gráfica Argentina, 1953), p. 86; ‘Taʿrikh al-ṣiḥāfa al-ʿarabiyya fi al-Tūkūmān’, *al-Nasr*, Jan. 1923, pp. 73–86.

⁷⁶ Supplement to *al-Zamān*, no. 300, 30 March 1909. The Samra brothers were Christians from a village near Tripoli. The paper’s front page possessed both the Argentine and Ottoman coat of arms. According to notes found in the file at the Centre des Archives Nationales in Beirut, the paper’s role in Syrian life in Argentina was critical. The brothers acted as interlocutors and conciliators between the Arabic-speaking community and Argentines, as well as peacemakers within the community itself. In addition, they played a critical role in simmering down the controversy between the Ottoman consul, Emir Emin Arslan, and certain members of the colony who rejected Arslan’s attempt to give Ottoman citizenship to children of immigrants from the empire. See file on *al-Zamān*, Centre des Archives Nationales, Beirut.

⁷⁷ Supplement to *al-Zamān*, no. 300, 30 March 1909.

the venerable Ottoman parliament should refute the current of thought espoused by the group in Paris by informing and educating the youth. Finally, they declared that people in the Argentine mahjar did not agree with anything that appeared in the publications of the Parisian society and rejected every claim that 'harms the country or Ottoman society'.⁷⁸

The establishment of consular relations in 1910 between Istanbul and Buenos Aires coincided with an intensification of emigration from Greater Syria to Argentina. In addition, the protocol arranged for the founding of an Ottoman consulate in Buenos Aires. On 29 October 1910, Emir Emin Arslan, the first consul-general, arrived aboard the steamship *Chili* to an exuberant welcome by a crowd of 4,000 Ottoman subjects.⁷⁹ In preparation for Arslan's arrival a mass of people, including members of the Unión Siria (Syrian Union) and the Sociedad Israelita (Israelite Society), marched from the hall of the Young Ottoman Society. Immigrants waving banners and flags from all three organisations led the march. Another parade of Syrians marched to the central docks from the southern neighbourhood of La Boca.⁸⁰ After the crowd had waited for more than three hours, Arslan's ship, flying the Ottoman flag at full mast, docked, and bands from the Young Ottoman Society and the Israelite Society performed the Argentine national anthem, the Ottoman hymn and the *Marseillaise*. Consul Arslan offered words of thanks to the throng of compatriots and to Argentina for its generosity.⁸¹

The reception committee then ushered Arslan into a waiting car and set off for the Plaza Hotel, the fanciest hotel in the capital.⁸² A procession of people on foot, extending over several city blocks, followed a motorcade of 80 automobiles 'occupied by Turkish men and women'.⁸³ The excitement grew when Argentine spectators from the balconies overlooking the famed Calle Florida began saluting the 'colectividad otomana', or Ottoman community, as the marchers below praised Argentina.⁸⁴ Once at the hotel, Arslan appeared on a balcony overlooking the assembled Ottoman subjects and the Plaza San Martín and offered his thanks to the organising committee.⁸⁵ From the crowd a gentleman representing the Ottoman Jewish community expressed satisfaction at the coming of the 'representative of Turkey'. After moving on to the editorial offices of the Arabic-language periodical *al-Salām*, the bands played the national hymns again; the crowd then dispersed 'with the same enthusiasm demonstrated during the entire day'.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ 'El Cónsul General de Turquía', *El País*, 30 Oct. 1910.

⁸⁰ 'Arribo del Cónsul Otomano', *La Nación*, 30 Oct. 1910.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*; 'Llegada del Cónsul Otomano', *La Prensa*, 30 Oct. 1910.

⁸² 'Llegada del Cónsul Otomano', *La Prensa*, 30 Oct. 1910; 'Arribo del Cónsul Otomano', *La Nación*, 30 Oct. 1910. ⁸³ 'Arribo del Cónsul Otomano', *La Nación*, 30 Oct. 1910.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; 'El Cónsul General de Turquía', *El País*, 30 Oct. 1910.

⁸⁶ 'Arribo del Cónsul Otomano', *La Nación*, 30 Oct. 1910.

Syrians in Argentina maintained connections to the Ottoman government and various Arab movements in the immediate years before the war. They questioned the vice-president of the Ottoman parliament, Suleiman al-Bustani, about the slowness of the political reforms promised by the CUP; sent an envoy to a 1911 conference held in Egypt concerning political reform in the Ottoman Empire; received an appeal for support from the Lebanese Committee of Paris regarding political reform proposals in 1912; and entertained a request for editorials relating political positions in regard to the Ottoman Administrative Decentralisation Party's platform.⁸⁷ Hence, allegiance to and affinity for the Ottoman Empire was widespread in the Syrian colonies, and cut across class lines and religious identities. Expressions of loyalty to the Ottoman state were not particular to Buenos Aires, but rather seemed to galvanise many in the Argentine mahjar. Indeed, these sentiments were similar to those found in other Syrian émigré communities in the Americas.

As a sign of the increased economic and political importance of Tucumán to the Syrian communities in Argentina, in April 1913 Elias Turbay – the merchant and poet based in the small town of Río Seco, which serviced the La Providencia sugar factory – invited Simón Hamati to move his family to Tucumán from Buenos Aires with the promise of a printing press to support his writing.⁸⁸ Hamati had begun publishing a periodical entitled *al-Nasr*, or *El Aguila* (*The Eagle*), in the federal capital in January 1913. Turbay, who became *al-Nasr*'s distributor and authorised agent (*wakīl* in Arabic) in northern Argentina, worked with Nagib Baaclini to secure the start-up capital to purchase a printing press, an effort noted as a 'noble work' and a service to the welfare and success of the Syrian colony.⁸⁹ In addition to the publication of Arabic-language periodicals in Tucumán, intellectuals were involved in various forms of literary and cultural activity. By 1920 the cultural elite in the Tucumán mahjar, through its body the Lajnat Ta^cziz al-ṣiḥāfa (Journalism Stimulus Commission), called for the establishment of the al-Rābiṭa al-Adabiyya al-Tūkūmāniyya (Tucumán Literary League) to encourage and cultivate journalistic endeavours and the arts.⁹⁰ These intellectuals initiated an

⁸⁷ Copies of the related correspondence, dated 4 Feb. 1910, 24 Feb. 1911, 25 June 1912 and 6 May 1913 respectively, are in Akmir, 'La inmigración árabe en Argentina', pp. 784–96. The Decentralisation Party, founded in January 1913, was based in Egypt and led by Syrian émigrés, and advocated administrative decentralisation of the Arab lands within the Ottoman imperial superstructure: see Philip S. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus, 1860–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 63–4.

⁸⁸ 'Tarikh as-Sahafat al-'Arabiyyah fi at-Tūkūmān', *al-Nasr*, Jan. 1923, p. 73.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–4.

⁹⁰ 'Taḥiyya al-ikhhlāṣ b-ism al-rābiṭa al-adabiyya al-Tūkūmāniyya', *al-Sa^cāda*, part 1 (May 1920). The majority of the members of the commission were important merchants within the

impressive period of cultural production that yielded poetry recitals, theatrical performances and nine periodicals by 1922.

For Arabic-speakers in the mahjar, however, the competing loyalties of regional identification, national loyalty, religious affinity and village origin experienced intense strains during the transformative events of the First World War.⁹¹ The catastrophe of famine and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the Levant provoked a fluid and contested environment in Argentina wherein symbols took on new, at times fleeting meanings as Syrians in the mahjar struggled to come to terms with the transformational events affecting their homeland. The emergence of competing nationalist visions among the Syrian cultural elite throughout the Americas initiated a visceral debate, which included the communities in Argentina.

Two main schools of thought dominated the Argentine mahjar during the First World War: one advocated remaining a part of the Ottoman Empire with a federal constitution, and the other lobbied to leave the empire and create a large Arab confederated nation.⁹² In the winter of 1916 Syrians in Argentina established the al-Ḥizb al-ʿUthmānī (Ottoman Party). The platform of the party had six points: to defend the territorial integrity of the empire; to combat 'internal despotism'; to transform the empire into a 'confederation of states' with complete autonomy and free internal elections; to make Arabic an official language like Turkish; to distribute administrative positions proportionally among the cultural groups within the empire; and to use all means necessary to educate the 'Arab masses' and prepare them for the elections that would follow the war.⁹³ Following the announcement of the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottomans, led by Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, some members of the Ottoman Party left to form the al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī al-ʿArabī (Arab Patriotic Party), joining others who had not been members of the older party. This political entity called for the total independence of all Arab lands and the establishment of a large unified confederation.⁹⁴

Syrian colony of Tucumán, but it also included at least one merchant from the province of Jujuy. The members were Muslims and Christians.

⁹¹ For a full development of the notion of competing loyalties, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 63–88.

⁹² Mohamed Yassine Abderrahman, *Adalid rioplatense* (Buenos Aires, 1954), p. 159.

⁹³ Abderrahman, *Adalid rioplatense*, p. 160. The pro-Ottoman circle articulated their position in the periodicals *al-ʿAlam al-ʿUthmānī*, led by Saifuddin Rahal, and *al-Shams*. Rahal was an Egyptian who studied at the premier Islamic institution of learning, al-Azhar in Cairo. He would be a leading voice of the Muslim community in Argentina through the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1920s he established an Islamic school with a curriculum based on the modernist teachings of Jamaledin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, both instructors at al-Azhar. Abduh was Grand Mufti of Egypt from 1899 to 1905.

⁹⁴ Abderrahman, *Adalid rioplatense*, pp. 160–1.

In addition to these larger political currents there was a smaller movement led by the Maronite Lebanese missionary priests, who encouraged France to assume the role of guarantor of Lebanese independence.⁹⁵ Following the establishment of the French mandate in Greater Syria in 1920, however, the question of Lebanon became the crucial issue that divided the Syrian colony in Tucumán and throughout the Americas.

Syrian intellectuals in Tucumán actively participated on all sides of the nationalist debates circulating throughout the Americas relating to Ottoman political life. Control of the Arabic printing press was critical to the propagation of these competing ideologies in north-western Argentina. In May 1914, Hamati and Turbay lost the printing press; Miguel Hadle, a prominent Syrian merchant in Tucumán, bought it and turned over editorial management of the periodical to José Khoueiry, a Lebanese nationalist and member of the Buenos Aires-based independence organisation the Lebanese Union. This group renamed the publication *al-Waṭan* (*The Nation*), and began publishing under the new name in September 1915. Hamati accused Khoueiry of possessing an ‘infatuation’ for all things French based on France’s historic role as protector of Maronite Catholics; indeed, many disagreed with Khoueiry’s positions, and this apparently led to a decline in readership and advertising receipts.⁹⁶

Antonio Eleas, a Maronite immigrant living in Tucumán, wrote a controversial essay in response to *al-Waṭan* in October 1915. A well-educated merchant and son of an Ottoman official from Baniyas in Syria, Eleas’ two-part essay in a Tucumán daily, *La Gaceta*, entitled ‘El Líbano’ (‘Lebanon’), was disseminated throughout the Argentine mahjar and, in testament to its importance, was republished in Nagib Baaclini’s *Ṣada al-Sharq* (*Echo of the Orient*) in late 1917. Eleas argued that Mount Lebanon had been condemned to uncertainty and poverty by poor governance and retarded economic development. Nevertheless, the creation of a network of schools in the nineteenth century had given Mount Lebanon’s inhabitants access to education and ‘free ideas’. The limitations of sericulture, or raising silk worms for silk production, partly inspired massive emigration from Mount Lebanon into the mahjar, principally in the Americas. France, in this moment, was viewed as Mount Lebanon’s saviour. The Young Turk Revolution changed the dynamic, however – the reopening of the Ottoman parliament, complete with politicians from Mount Lebanon, was tantamount to the renunciation of the autonomous privileges that the area had enjoyed

⁹⁵ Akmir, ‘La inmigración árabe en Argentina’, pp. 422–31.

⁹⁶ Contador Interventor al Juez, 14 May 1914, Archivo General de la Provincia de Tucumán, Sucesión de Andrés Getar, caja 860, exp. 17, serie E; ‘Ta’rikh al-ṣihāfa al-‘arabiyya fi al-Tūkūmān’, *al-Nasr*, Jan. 1923, pp. 75–7.

since 1861. Eleas pointed out that various men from prominent Mount Lebanon families, such as the consul, Emin Arslan, saw their world as part of the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁷ In the most controversial passage, Eleas proclaimed unequivocally that Lebanon was an integral part of Syria, and Syria of the empire. He further critiqued the emphasis on religion as a point of division among people of the same Arab race.⁹⁸

Eleas' declaration dismissed the notion that Mount Lebanon constituted a separate entity distinct from the rest of Greater Syria. It also directly challenged the platform of José Khoueiry's *al-Waṭan* by arguing that Mount Lebanon was a part of the Ottoman Empire. These sentiments, strongest in the Argentine mahjar during the years shortly after the Young Turk Revolution, faded away as the war played out and famine gripped the old country. Nevertheless, many in the Syrian colony desired to remain a part of the Ottoman Empire, a position that transcended religious differences. Eleas also forwarded the notion of a solidarity based upon the idea of a shared Arab race that superseded religious identities, and his comments criticised the increasing politicisation of religious identities. In the Syrian colonies the politics of belonging was initially based upon a shared sense of place and community and a shared socio-economic status; religion was merely one variable among several, but not the principal fault line of separation. Though their immediate results were short-lived, the emergence of *al-Waṭan* and the essay by Eleas ushered the politics of home and of the First World War into the Tucumán mahjar's daily discussion.

At certain moments, the internal politics of the Syrian colony intersected with Argentine public political sentiments. Under President Hipólito Yrigoyen, Argentina maintained a policy of strict neutrality during the First World War in order to facilitate trade with all parties. Imperial Germany's campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare, however, led to the sinking of an Argentine merchant ship, the *Monte Protegido*, on 4 April 1917.⁹⁹ Eleven days later, on 15 April, 10,000 people demonstrated against the German attack on the Argentine vessel in front of the government house in San Miguel de Tucumán. During the protest Nagib Baaclini gave a speech in Spanish on behalf of the Syrians in Argentina. Declaring that he and his compatriots were 'oppressed by the barbarous Turks', Baaclini unleashed a verbal assault on the Ottoman Empire, Germany's ally in the war effort. He commented on the despotism of Sultan °Abd al-Hamid II and on the failure of the Young Turk

⁹⁷ Turbay, *al-Manzumāt al-Durriyya*, p. 53; 'El Líbano', *La Gaceta*, 20 and 21 Oct. 1915. In introducing the essay, Baaclini, the editor of *Ṣada al-Sharq*, declared that, although he did not entirely agree with Eleas' arguments, the essay merited continued discussion and debate within the colony: see *Ṣada al-Sharq*, 1 Dec. 1917.

⁹⁸ 'El Líbano', *La Gaceta*, 21 Oct. 1915.

⁹⁹ Newton, *German Buenos Aires, 1900–1933*, p. 49.

Revolution.¹⁰⁰ He announced that the Arabs had ‘arisen from their deep slumber’, led by their king, Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, and rejected the attribution of Syrians to the ‘murderous Turk’, ‘Abd al-Hamid. He concluded, ‘Down with the Turks! Long live the Arab Caliphate!’¹⁰¹

The idea of establishing an Arab caliphate in place of the Ottoman variety appealed to many Syrians in Argentina, but religious identities were beginning to be politicised in a way quite unlike anything previously experienced within the colony. It would be a mistake, however, to believe that religious identity necessarily predicted the political ideologies and movements to which an individual adhered. The politics of belonging in the mahjar did not divide along religious lines before the seminal event of the First World War, and similarly many Christians in Argentina believed in a racialised identity and supported the idea of a kingdom led by Hussein. Of particular note is the venue chosen by Nagib Baaclini; like Antonio Eleas, Baaclini chose an Argentine forum to engage in an internal debate on the Syrian colony. Claiming to speak for the community at large, Baaclini repudiated the Ottoman state and, by proxy, those who still supported the government in Istanbul – and he did it in front of thousands of Argentines.

The debate that Baaclini stirred in this public manner was caustic and internally divisive, provoking violent confrontations. As in the Arabic press in the United States, where ‘talk of compromise turned to talk of confrontation, separation, and full-fledged independence’, the debates over the political future of the Levant reached a fever pitch in Buenos Aires and Tucumán as the war proceeded apace.¹⁰² The editorial board of *al-‘Alam al-‘Uthmānī* (*The Ottoman Standard*) in Buenos Aires argued on 28 February 1917, ‘We are Arabs. But we are Ottomans before anything else. Our [position] is related ... [to] the principles of the Ottoman Constitution’.¹⁰³ Yet, that same day, *al-Mursal* (*The Missionary*), a highly respected periodical produced by Maronite priests in Buenos Aires, published an urgent call to form a ‘General Syrian Society’ that would lead the independence movement. Interestingly, this announcement specifically included Lebanese as a group within the larger Syrian body politic.¹⁰⁴ Clashes between the directors of *al-Mursal*, *al-‘Alam al-‘Uthmānī*, *al-Shams* (*The Sun*), and Simon Hamati’s *al-Nasr* became acerbic in tone and also involved Arab nationalists based in São Paulo in Brazil.¹⁰⁵ The conflict in the papers was manifested in fighting on the street.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Fī Sabīl al-Wājib’, *al-Nasr*, 3 (1 May 1917), pp. 73–7.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77. Baaclini’s speech was reprinted in Arabic by *al-Nasr*.

¹⁰² Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, p. 99.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Akmir, ‘La inmigración árabe en Argentina’, p. 421.

¹⁰⁴ ‘al-Umma al-Sūriyya’, *al-Mursal*, 28 Feb. 1917.

¹⁰⁵ ‘al-Fakāha, aw Sayf al-Dīn Raḥāl’, *al-Nasr*, 3 (1 May 1917); ‘Ila *al-‘Alam al-‘Uthmānī*’, *al-Nasr*, 6 (15 June 1917).

Following two weeks of violent street demonstrations among the Syrian colony in Buenos Aires, the acting Ottoman consul-general dispatched a letter to the interim Argentine foreign minister demanding that the local authorities prohibit the flying of the Lebanese Union's flag from particular buildings owned or inhabited by members of the association. Pointing out that this group was a separatist organisation, the Ottoman consul-general reminded his counterpart that Mount Lebanon remained an Ottoman territory and listed the addresses perpetrating the offence.¹⁰⁶ The confrontations in the newspapers and at street rallies ultimately led the pro-Ottoman community to quit the so-called *barrio de los turcos* (Turkish neighbourhood) and relocate to Calle Venezuela.¹⁰⁷

While political crises within the Syrian colonies became evident across Argentina, Jamil Mardam, a Muslim from Damascus and future Syrian prime minister, and Dr. César Lakah, a Greek Catholic Syrian and French citizen, led a recruiting mission for the Paris-based Syrian Central Commission, arriving in Argentina in November 1917. Made up of Syrians living in Paris, this organisation received state funds from France, sought the liberation of Syria under French protection, and pursued donations and volunteers from the Syrian émigré communities in the Americas. The mission raised 100,000 francs and a group of volunteers from the communities in Brazil, and an additional 20 recruits from the colony in Montevideo, but did not achieve the same success in Argentina. The envoys met immediate resistance from the Lebanese Union, which opposed the goal of a unified Syria, bristled at the absence of a Maronite on the mission, and launched a propaganda campaign against the envoys. As a result, Mardam and Lakah focused on the colonies in north-western Argentina; however, the Maronites there resisted collaborating with the Greek Orthodox (who were mostly from the province of Damascus), Melchite, Armenian, Druze and Muslim communities.¹⁰⁸

The beginning of the new decade witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the fall of King Faisal in Damascus. The 1920s were a volatile time for those immigrants who kept close watch on events in their homelands. Arab nationalists viewed the short-lived monarchy of Faisal I in Damascus as the realisation of their dreams and political activities in Argentina. France's forceful deposition of Faisal in July 1920 and the subsequent creation of the state of Greater Lebanon, which would become the French-dependent Republic of Lebanon in 1926, became critical events for Lebanese nationalists. In addition, Argentina received dissident intellectuals from these newly

¹⁰⁶ Bobrik to Pueyrredón, 30 July 1917, Archivo Histórico de Cancillería, caja 1691, exp. 7.

¹⁰⁷ Akmir, 'La inmigración árabe en Argentina', pp. 102–7.

¹⁰⁸ Eliezer Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp. 208–18.

formed states during the early years of the French mandate, which was ratified by the League of Nations in 1922. In the face of these divisive developments, still other Syrians in Argentina began to establish organisations and periodicals eschewing the separatist issues dividing the community and advocating a politics of Arab cultural unity. For instance, young Syrian intellectuals formed the Jam'īyya al-Shabība al-Muttaḥida (United Youth Association) in San Miguel de Tucumán on 4 June 1921. This group held public events, published a newspaper and staged plays. Members of United Youth utilised the printing press to further their mission. In January 1922, Gabriel Candalaft and Wadi Hadle, in collaboration with Nagib Baaclini, launched an Arabic monthly literary review, *al-Hadiqa* (*The Garden*). In the opening editorial, the directors declared:

When all the American mahjar newspapers harped on politics, especially religion and politics, each newspaper considered a policy to be the correct one for the nation and the homeland ['al-ummah wa al-waṭan'], [and supported it] with proofs and evidence. Then, [each newspaper] announced its opinion to the people. [One newspaper] proclaims that Lebanon must be completely independent, another will proclaim that Lebanon should join Syria and unite the two countries, another supports occupation, and many others [support] right and wrong ideas about religion and politics ... As a result, both Syrians and Lebanese floundered together in darkness, confused which policy to listen to and which one to join.¹⁰⁹

The editors suggested that the inability to coalesce around a policy satisfying to all concerned resulted from poor national education. As a pedagogical tool, the editors viewed novels as the 'first school' and the 'true way to reach the summit of civilisation'. In short, the proposed literature would inspire love for the homeland and evade the realm of divisive politics.¹¹⁰ The presence of Baaclini on the editorial board of *al-Hadiqa* is interesting because he would later become a supporter of France and its mission in Lebanon. Nevertheless, his call for a cooling-down of political rhetoric among the community would have carried some weight and, at the very least, exemplified the concerns of the leaders of Tucumán's Syrian colony about the rise in political tensions.

In the inaugural edition of the United Youth Association's periodical, *al-Shabība al-Muttaḥida* (*United Youth*), the group unequivocally declared that it would neither 'enter the doors of politics' nor 'plunge into the "religious issues"'.¹¹¹ These leaders instead focused on the issues that they felt would strengthen the unity and solidarity of Syrians in Tucumán. The periodical featured research on commercial issues and articles on literature, history and society. The intentional avoidance of religion and nationalist politics provides a glimpse into the internal debates surrounding the politics of

¹⁰⁹ 'Kalimātunā al-ūla', *al-Hadiqa*, 3 Jan. 1922.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ 'Taḥiyya al-Shabība', *al-Shabība al-Muttaḥida*, 3 Feb. 1923.

belonging and the stresses that threatened to fragment the elite of the Syrian colony.

Conclusion

The First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire provoked an existential crisis for members of the Syrian colony in Argentina, leading to the dissolution of a shared sense of community. The emergence of politicised ethno-regional and racialised identities among Arabic-speakers in Argentina was brought about by transformations in the home country. Indeed, the Sultan's subjects had shared a broad-based Ottoman political identity, but the First World War created a space where Syrian intellectuals in Tucumán and Buenos Aires could publish periodicals disseminating competing nationalist discourses and information about separatist movements. These debates, which occasioned internecine violence in Argentina, situated Syrians in an arabophone Republic of Letters that connected them to peers throughout the Americas and in the homeland. This shared imagined space gave émigrés a stake in the destiny of their homeland and the opportunity to fashion anew a sense of place and community in Argentina.

Transnational politics and processes produced enduring consequences for Syrians residing in Argentina. The role and place of the old country was ever-present among many, if not most, Arabic-speakers, and the creation and evolution of Syrian and Lebanese identities in the mahjar was a contentious affair; divisions followed political ideologies and not necessarily religious loyalties. Hence, homeland politics overwhelmed the cohesion of a larger Syrian community, in this sense offering a comparison with the German case and a contrast with the examples of the Spaniards and Italians.¹¹² Furthermore, the politics of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon and the pursuit of self-determination by committed Arab, Syrian and Lebanese nationalists in Argentina ultimately led to the fragmentation of the Syrian cultural elites in Buenos Aires and Tucumán. The fashioning of a Syrian–Lebanese community by these immigrants in the early 1920s, in the shadow of European colonialism, stood in difference to Italian state attempts to organise its citizens in Argentina and elsewhere.¹¹³

The role of transnational politics and processes among immigrant colonies in Latin America, therefore, is not well studied, yet is full of potential. These communities were neither walled off from local society nor detached from the

¹¹² Newton, *German Buenos Aires*, pp. 169–83; Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, pp. 318–27; Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise*, pp. 174–7. It is unclear what impact the Spanish Civil War had on the Spanish immigrant community in Buenos Aires.

¹¹³ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

issues of their homelands. Sensitivity to the transnational component thus situates immigrants in a milieu that is at once distinctly local, and yet not bound by national borders. Émigrés utilised a variety of strategies to maintain contact with, and contribute to, their families who remained behind, yet transformative political issues in their countries of origin had a direct impact on these communities throughout Latin America, in relation to both internal organisation and inter-immigrant relationships. These people sat at the nexus of global processes and local particularities, and thus influenced and were affected by cultural, social and political change both in the old country and in their new surroundings. Greater sensitivity to these intersecting processes will allow for an assessment of the entirety of the immigrant experience.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo examina cómo inmigrantes sirios en Argentina respondieron al encuentro entre políticas transnacionales y los nacientes nacionalismos entre 1900 y 1922. En particular, el ensayo estudia el papel de intelectuales sirios en Argentina en la defensa de una variedad de lealtades políticas que cambiaron en el tiempo en la medida en que sus lugares de origen sufrieron intensas transformaciones políticas durante las dos primeras décadas del siglo XX. La emergencia de las identidades étnicas sirias y libanesas, así como una identidad árabe racializada, fue el producto de distintos programas políticos circulando en el Levante y entre las comunidades sirias emigradas en América Latina, amenazando con minar la sensación de comunidad de la colonia inmigrante.

Spanish keywords: migración transnacional, nacionalismo, política de inmigración, Argentina, Imperio Otomán

Portuguese abstract. Examina-se como imigrantes sírios na Argentina responderam à intersecção de políticas transnacionais e nacionalismos emergentes entre 1900 e 1922. Especificamente, estuda-se o papel de intelectuais sírios na Argentina, defendendo uma variedade de alianças políticas que foram alteradas ao longo do tempo em que sua pátria natal sofreu uma série de transformações políticas intensas durante as primeiras duas décadas do século XX. O aparecimento de identidades étnicas sírias e libanesas assim como uma identidade árabe racializada foi o resultado de programas políticos distintos que circulavam no Levante e entre as comunidades imigrantes sírias nas Américas que ameaçavam minar o senso de comunidade da colônia de imigrantes.

Portuguese keywords: imigração transnacional, nacionalismo, políticas dos imigrantes, Argentina, Império Otomano