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# The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

## Ethnicity Homegrown: How the Lebanese-Argentines in Buenos Aires Construct Ethnicity

A Thesis Submitted by  
Bianca Natasha Kemp

to the Middle East Studies Center  
May 2013

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

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## Introduction

Allow me to open with an anecdote. In July and August of 2011, I conducted ethnographic research on the construction of ethnicity among the Lebanese-Argentine population of Buenos Aires, Argentina. En route to Argentina from Cairo, I stopped over in Cape Town, South Africa where I stayed in an eco-village and regularly ate at the neighborhood's Millhouse Organic Restaurant. The staff there was mostly black. *Amandla!* Having seen this powerful documentary on apartheid prompted me to seize the moments I had in Cape Town to personally inquire of a black experience in South Africa. The morning before I left for South America, I went to pay for breakfast at Millhouse and stopped to speak with a black lady tidying up the store portion of the establishment.

“I mean, being a black woman traveling around, I'm always interested in other black people's experiences in different countries. So, what's it like being black here?” I questioned, feigning nonchalance.

I watched her body stiffen. Almost surely she had emotionally clammed up, too.

“What, you're doing research here or something?” She briefly stared out over the

porch and then continued mopping. “That’s a pretty generic question. We get asked that pretty often. I mean, it’s, you know, different. It’s okay.” Still mopping.

“What’d she ask you?” a younger black man at the register piped in.

“She wanted to know what it’s like being black here.”

He dropped his head, shook it with a smirk and resumed counting money. Those were neither the reactions I had hoped for, nor anticipated.

I share this experience at the outset, because this brief conversation recolored my approach to the thesis research I would carry out on the shaping of Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity in Buenos Aires. I left with three very poignant lessons. Lesson one: if I were to get anything out of my work in Argentina I would have to learn to ask the “right” questions, and in a manner that would allow willing participants to divulge their perceptions on Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity with little to no resistance. At Millhouse, I naively thought I would be privy to some fascinating data for no other reason than the fact that I was black, like my subjects. And while certain commonalities or even differences between researcher and subject can undoubtedly facilitate trust—and thus “fruitful” research—ultimately, it is the way in which interactions are initiated and carried forward that can really bear “fruit”. But lesson two was as equally salient. Delicately posing meaningful inquiries is key; however, reactions to whatever bait thrown out are every bit as telling. Much richness lies in silences, defensiveness, squirming, chuckles and stalling. The in-tune researcher knows to pay attention to body language and choice of words. But he or she also knows to remain alert to his or her own biases when analyzing participants' responses. And finally, there was lesson three. Whatever expectations I had developed, whatever I thought (or hoped) I would find in the field prior to actually getting there had to be tossed, for surely they would spoil the fruit of lessons one and two.

The argumentation of the thesis is two-pronged. First, I assert that a Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity is non-essential, and second, if and when descendants of Lebanese heritage decide to construct a hybrid Lebanese ethnic identity in Buenos Aires, it is a simulation of what it means to be Lebanese. This implies members of the Lebanese-Argentine ethnic group reference and express ethnic emblems germane to Lebanese ethnicity according to their understanding of Lebanese-ness.

I expound. For the first prong of the thesis, I adopt Livio Sansone's stance on

ethnic identity in *Blackness without Ethnicity* in which he posits that “...many people can live quite happily without such things as ethnicity. There are certain people who do not identify with a single given ethnic identity” (Sansone, 2003, p. 7). In this same vein, I assert that Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity is not essential. However, in the second prong, I extend beyond Sansone's claim to argue that when members of the Lebanese diasporic population in Buenos Aires (which have had varying degrees of contact with the home country, Lebanon, and its culture) do construct a Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity, it is a simulation of their understanding of what it means to be of Lebanese descent. I primarily look to Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard's study of *simulacrum* and simulation for theoretical guidance as to how this process unfolds in Buenos Aires. I test my claims with ethnographic data from the field.

By my lights, the final thesis is much richer in content than the initial plan of study I devised. Below is an excerpt of the thesis proposal I submitted to The American University in Cairo Middle East Studies Center a few short months before I departed Cairo for the field in July 2011:

In my thesis I aim to explore the construction of ethnicity among the Lebanese-Argentine youth of Buenos Aires, Argentina, aged 18 to 25, as first, a reaction to the constructed ethnicities of previous Lebanese-Argentine generations; second, a *simulacrum* of their understanding of what it means to be of Lebanese descent; and third, a response to social, political and economic forces in modern Argentine society. More explicitly, I seek to investigate how today's Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity has survived and adapted to the assimilationist policies of the early Argentinean government, especially in light of earlier generations' willingness to culturally assimilate. Has there been a recent resurgence of Lebanese traditions and customs among Buenos Aires' Lebanese-Argentine youth? If so, in what ways has this resurgence manifested? I will then situate my research findings within the current social, political and economic circumstances of Buenos Aires, and discuss how these factors affect the construction of contemporary ethnic identity among Lebanese-Argentinean youth.

After several weeks of research in Buenos Aires—combing through the Yellow Pages for restaurants, social clubs and dance schools; explaining my thesis research with the polite Argentines who were intrigued enough to listen; conducting interviews with willing participants; visiting restaurants, centers, bookstores, libraries and other potentially relevant locations; and hitting the pavement of the capital's *barrios* on a

hunt for tell-tale signs of a Lebanese presence—I began to sense something I could not have known while still preparing for fieldwork in Cairo, Egypt. Indeed, there were obvious markers of an Arab, and even specifically, Lebanese presence. On more than one occasion I observed a real estate sign with the agent's last name: Haddad. A brick fountain and memorial had been erected in honor of renowned Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran. (Conveniently (and perhaps deliberately) it sat close to *Calle Líbano* or “Lebanon Street”.) Painted on the side of a municipal trash receptacle in my neighborhood, Montserrat, was an advertisement for a belly dance school; it was the nicest of the several notices I saw for the dance form plastered about the city on walls and doors. On a plaque in the square behind the illustrious *Teatro Colón* was a brief mention of the Jewish and Arab communities that had once lived in the neighborhood. Carrefour even sold a commercialized brand of Arabic bread by the company Bimbo. Yet, I was much more struck by what I *did not* find about the Lebanese-Argentine population, than what I did.

All of these ethnic and cultural indicators seemed to dangle isolated in the ether. When I followed their trail backwards in pursuit of a source, I did not find a specific neighborhood with an obviously higher percentage of people of Middle Eastern descent, unlike the *barrio* Once. This neighborhood was clearly the spot to where the more recently arrived Peruvians and Bolivians gravitated. In some interviews with participants of Syro-Lebanese or Lebanese descent, I did not detect a particularly strong identification with the host ethnicity or culture of Lebanon. And in the greater Argentine historical narrative—evident mostly in books, bookstores, libraries and through conversations with Argentines not of Lebanese descent—I noted more silences on the (Syro-) Lebanese impact than utterances. Undoubtedly, there is a Lebanese population in the capital of Argentina (even if the national census does not specify so). Surely, there are conspicuous signs of this population about the capital. And logically, if there are ethnic and cultural markers present, there is potential for the construction of a hybrid Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity. This hybrid cultural identification is theoretically there for the taking, but who is claiming it? How do curious second- and third-generation Lebanese assume and express their ethnic identity? And do they claim this ethnicity in whole or in part? (Is this even a possibility?) These refined questions are at the crux of the final thesis.

The methodology for the thesis is as follows: As an ethnographic study of the transformation of the Lebanese turned Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity in Buenos Aires, I relied on informal interviews, visits to and observations of the Lebanese embassy, social clubs/centers, monuments, restaurants, bookshops, a mosque, a church, neighborhoods, museums, dance schools, a language center and the national library. I also conducted research through online forums and social media, the Buenos Aires telephone book, Argentine magazines and newspapers, digital databases, pertinent websites and online radio broadcasts.

Additionally, I consulted secondary sources at The American University in Cairo (AUC) library on the history of Argentina, Lebanon, ethnicity, *simulacrum*, simulation, mimesis, migration, assimilation, and Arabs in the diaspora. My thesis committee members, Dr. Reem Saad (thesis adviser), Dr. Hanan Kholoussy (thesis reader), and Dr. Malak Rouchdy (thesis reader), have given invaluable suggestions on how to better focus my research. Conversations with both Dr. Ibrahim Awad and Dr. Ghada Barsoum, both faculty members at AUC, yielded interesting ideas on how to approach the study of ethnicity, places to conduct research in Buenos Aires, and potentially useful contacts abroad. Dr. Awad is a specialist in migration and lived in Argentina for two and a half years working with the Arab League of Nations. Dr. Barsoum wrote her doctoral dissertation on the construction of the ethno-religious identity of Copts living in Canada. I also made use of online databases, such as WorldCat and JSTOR, in order to access theses, articles and books written on ethnicity, *simulacrum*, simulation, Argentina, and Lebanon.

The thesis is divided into four chapters; one question guides the direction of each chapter. I begin with the inquiry, “Who were the Syro-Lebanese?” Demographics; motives for emigrating from Greater Syria and immigrating to Argentina, generally and Buenos Aires, specifically; as well as the creation of a commission for immigration are all key themes. The chapter also delves into the positivist and cultural nationalist intellectual movements, which greatly shaped the burgeoning nation's xenophobic attitude and assimilationist policies. Finally, I round off the chapter with an examination of how the early Syro-Lebanese adapted to their host country.

“What is ethnicity?” directs the second chapter. I employ the theories of Max



Weber, Fredrik Barth, Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, et. al., in exploring what constitutes ethnic identity. I echo Livio Sansone's claim that ethnicity is not an essential identity, and in the instance it is not embraced, race and/or nationality are two other satisfying ways of self-identification.

Yet, if Lebanese-Argentines do claim an ethnic identity after space and the passage of time mean a chasm between Lebanon and Buenos Aires, how do they construct it? And why? Chapter three addresses the notion of simulation, the process (I hypothesize) through which second-, third- and fourth-generation immigrants of Lebanese descent manufacture an authentic Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity in Buenos Aires, for pride and nostalgia are powerful. "What is simulation?" I look to the work of Pierre Klossowski, Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard in examining simulation and its predecessor, simulacrum.

Chapter four tests my hypothesis and answers two questions: "How do I know that Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity is a simulation of Lebanese ethnic identity?" and "What did I see in Buenos Aires to buttress my claim?" The first part of the chapter offers a historical, political, religious and cultural look at Lebanon. In *simulacrum*-speak, it gives a look at the "original", what Lebanese-Argentines actually may reference when constructing their own Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity. This section aims to situate the reader to better understand my observations in Buenos Aires. The second part of chapter four recounts what I initially encountered in the field while in the *Capital Federal*, and what I found on delving a bit deeper into the cultural landscape. From the use of social media, to dance and food and religion, this section proffers examples of some of the many ways in which Lebanese-Argentines are constructing and expressing their ethnic identity.

I conclude the thesis with a look at some of the profound implications of a Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity in Buenos Aires: Does this identity have the potential to supersede national borders and influence the course of international politics? If this be the case, then how so?

The final thesis is a contribution to Middle Eastern, migration, Latin American, nationalism, multicultural, identity and assimilation studies. It provides a detailed case of how an Arab diasporic population has adapted to its Latin American host country, and in turn, how this host country has accommodated its Arab

immigrants. Additionally, this study illustrates how these populations define themselves in relation to their home and host countries. It also explores the ways in which ethnicities are formed and evolve, and cultures “cross pollinate” each other. And perhaps most interestingly, the thesis joins a buzzing category of Middle Eastern scholarship whose scope reaches beyond the geographical borders of the region to investigate issues of migration and other cross-cultural connections the globe over.

Before I begin, the opening anecdote reminds me of the vantage point from which I have conducted ethnographic research and have written this thesis on the Lebanese-Argentine population of Buenos Aires. I am an African-American woman from the south of the United States, who has traveled some, and lived here and there beyond American borders. I accept full responsibility for my views and gladly welcome any suggestions to reconsider angles of my approach.

# Chapter One: Who Were the Syro-Lebanese?

Chapter one details the emigration of the Syro-Lebanese from Greater Syria through their immigration to Argentina in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. I touch on group demographics, motives for leaving Greater Syria, as well as reasons for migrating to Buenos Aires. I explore the xenophobic social environment to which the Syro-Lebanese arrived by examining positivism and cultural nationalism. These two intellectual movements fueled discrimination and greatly steered (or, conversely, were the manifestation of) the country's assimilationist policies towards “undesired” immigrants. The chapter concludes with a look at how the Syro-Lebanese eventually adapted to their new “home”.

Before diving into the historical matter, however, I provide a brief explanation of my usage of terms in the thesis. Some scholarly works on early Arab immigration to Argentina employ the labels “Syro-Lebanese”, “Syrian-Lebanese”, or “Syrio-Lebanese”, a hyphenation reflected on the ground in Buenos Aires. For example, there is *Club Sirio Libanés* (Syrian-Lebanese Club), *Fundación Sirio Libanesa para la Salud* (Syrian-Lebanese Foundation for Health), *Hospital Sirio Libanés* (Syrian-Lebanese Hospital), and the now defunct *Centro Social Sirio Libanés* (Syrian-Lebanese Social Center)<sup>1</sup>, in which early immigrants who claimed either Syrian or Lebanese nationality (or neither before the partition) came together to socialize, provide aid or charity for newer immigrants, or carry out some other function. “Sirio Libanés” became a common blanket term in 1920s Argentina for Arab immigrants; however, nominally it excludes those immigrants from other Arab countries, as well

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<sup>1</sup> *Club Siro Libanés* was founded in 1932 by Moises J. Azize, along with a group of immigrants from Greater Syria. The club began and remains social in nature, providing a location for formal visits, conferences, sports games and celebrations. *Fundación Sirio Libanesa para la Salud* is an off-shoot of *Hospital Sirio Libanés*, and founded in 2007 under President Ricardo Simes. It aims to “promote and develop various kinds of cultural, educational and research initiatives” fundamental to the *Hospital* (Fundación Sirio Libanesa para la Salud). *Hospital Sirio Libanés* began as *la Sociedad Damas de Misericordia* (Misericordia Women’s Society) under Rev. Father Elías María Gorayeb to tend to the medical, dietary and cultural needs of newly arrived immigrants from Greater Syria. In 1923, the doctors of the Greater Syrian community met to discuss the next phase of the organization, which had waned in previous years. It became *Asociación Beneficencia Sirio Libanesa* (Syrian-Lebanese Charitable Association), and eventually *Hospital Sirio Libanés*. *Centro Social Sirio Libanés* was founded in 1908 as *la Sociedad Siria de Socorros Mutuos* (Syrian Society of Mutual Aid) to aid immigrants arriving from Greater Syria.

as non-Arabs from Arab countries-(Civantos, 2006, p. viii). In this work, I use Syro-Lebanese in instances where it is explicitly employed, or for when referring to immigrants to Argentina who arrived before the partitioning of Greater Syria. For all other cases I utilize the title “Lebanese” or “Lebanese-Argentine”.<sup>2</sup>

### *Emigration from Greater Syria*

By the time the first Syro-Lebanese immigrants reached the port of Buenos Aires, they were mostly referred to as *turcos* (Turks), a misnomer that would eventually serve them in good stead as they tried to evade the Ottoman Empire's radar prohibiting emigration,<sup>3</sup> and shake off all too obvious indicators of their origin. According to Ignacio Klich (1992), between 1888 and 1914, roughly four percent of the 2.5 million immigrants to Argentina were from the Middle East or North Africa. These included what would today be termed Syrians, Lebanese, Jordanians, Palestinians and Israelis, as well as Iraqis, Egyptians, Moroccans and Algerians (p. 243). Between 1904 and 1913, the number of overall Arab immigrants to Argentina climaxed, and then dipped during the First World War. It rose mildly around 1931 after travel became easier post-war (Civantos, 2006, p. 7). According to Akram Khater (2001) the majority of Syro-Lebanese immigrated to Argentina after 1900 (p. 53).

Although this thesis focuses on Lebanese-Argentines, inaccuracies in official

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<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, as Dr. Kholoussy has pointed out, the issue of assigning categories here is hairy. It is a “methodological challenge”, because my labels of “Lebanese” or “Lebanese-Argentine” for some descendents of early immigrants from Greater Syria may be inaccurate. Even if a person’s lineage is from a town in what is now Lebanon, if the area was not technically in “Lebanon” at the time their antecedent emigrated (Lebanon as the present day state, nation, idea and culture), then I cannot project a Lebanese discourse onto the descendent. Only could I if they have claimed that discourse themselves. Therefore, my resolution has been to follow the dates and intuit the rest. If I am referring to immigrants from Greater Syria before 1943 in a purely past context, I use the term “Syro -Lebanese”. Conversely, I refer to those immigrating to Argentina after 1943 as “Lebanese”, again, in a purely past context. However, if my context is the present, but I am referencing the past, I use “Lebanese” or “Lebanese-Argentine” or even “Syria” based on the current configuration of the Levant for the sake of consistency. In addition to this being easier for me, I have found that those with ancestry from the Levant tend to claim Syrian or Lebanese heritage—whether naturally or by default.

<sup>3</sup>For conscription and taxation reasons.

Argentine record-keeping render exact figures for early Lebanese immigrants next to impossible. There are several plausible explanations for the lack of exactitude. Cristina Civantos (2006) cites “illegal departures, nonstandardized or inaccurate terms used to record origins at arrival points, and return migration” as principle culprits (p. 7). Klich (1992) seconds return migration, positing that officials were much less likely to record departures for the Syro-Lebanese who immigrated to Argentina only temporarily, such that re-immigrations and re-emigrations may have gone unaccounted for (p. 249). He also states that the Argentine government “defined immigrants as second- or third-class sea travelers, thereby excluding those who could afford more expensive fares or entered from the neighbouring countries”. Additionally, those native Arabic speakers holding European passports (most likely Maronite) would be counted as European immigrants, not Middle Eastern (Klich, 1992, p. 248). Finally, Estela Valverde (1992) states that many Syro-Lebanese immigrants traveled first to Montevideo, Uruguay, and then illegally entered Argentina via the Uruguay River—further skewing Migration Department data (p. 314).

We must also take into account the later partitioning of Greater Syria, which became Syria in 1946 and Lebanon in 1943 (as well as Palestine/Israel and Jordan). Early immigrants to Argentina who—today would be classified as Lebanese for their origin of emigration, could not have categorized themselves as such in the non-existence of a Lebanese state. Instead, they were categorized in different moments in Argentine history as Turks, Arabs, Syrians or Ottomans (Klich, 1992, p. 249).

### ***Demographics of Syro-Lebanese Immigrants to Argentina***

Still, available sources do provide some indication of early Syro-Lebanese demographics. The first migrants from Greater Syria were mostly Maronite, Melkite, or Eastern Orthodox Christian; however, in smaller numbers Sunni, Shiite and Alawite Muslims also immigrated to the Argentine state, as well as some Druze. Luz Maria Martinez Montiel (1992) suggests Middle Eastern Christians' general affinity for Latin American countries may have come in part due to “the possibility of living

in accordance with their religious beliefs”, where in Latin America Catholicism was prominent (p. 379).<sup>4</sup> Of Syro-Lebanese migrants, males outnumbered females, with anywhere from only two out of ten immigrants being women, to almost twice as many males as females making the trek (depending on sources consulted) (Khater, 2001, p. 70; Klich, 1992, p. 253). Married migrants often sent for their families once they had saved enough for their travel fare (sometimes up to 12 years later) (Valverde, 1992, p. 314).

José Luis Sahyoun,<sup>5</sup> co-owner of the family-owned and run Lebanese restaurant Cheff Iusef in the upscale, trendy neighborhood of Palermo, recounted during our interview that his grandfather immigrated to Argentina after the Second World War, and later returned to Lebanon for his wife and one of six children. In the case of single Syro-Lebanese immigrant men, some married within the Syro-Lebanese population in Buenos Aires. Iusef Sahyoun's wife, for example, had a Syrian father and Lebanese mother. The majority of single Syro-Lebanese men in Argentina, however, married exogamously, meaning they married women of non-Syro-Lebanese background.

### ***Motives for Emigration from Greater Syria***

Akram Khater (2001) says that many early emigrants from Greater Syria “expected to land somewhere, work for a while to gather money, and return home to live the good life” (p. 71). Yet, these migrants left for a multitude (and often a combination) of reasons that extended beyond a search for more abundant economic opportunities. Religious persecution and a desire for greater political freedom were among the powerful push-factors in emigration. Here I entertain a few popular postulates in

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4 Whereas a predominantly Catholic environment may arguably have been friendlier to Eastern Christians rather than one of Protestant predominance, or one being areligious or secular, Syro-Lebanese Christians nevertheless felt compelled to alter their religious practices to seem more palatable to a scrutinizing and xenophobic non-Arab elite.

5 Sahyoun is *hijo de libanés* (son of Lebanese). Amira, founder and cook of *Oasis, La Cocina de Amira* (Oasis, Amira's Kitchen), a Syrian eatery of mixed patronage in the neighborhood of Monserrat, said the term “*hijo/a de*” is used for first generation immigrants. Amira immigrated 19 years ago to Argentina from Yabroud, Syria (the same area from where former Argentinean President Carlos Menem's family comes) and has four children. I am unsure whether her husband is of Syrian background as well, nevertheless all her children are referred to as “*hijos de*”.

greater detail.

Religious persecution is one theory for Syro-Lebanese emigration (Issawi, 1992; Bruckmayr, 2010; Kawakibi, 2010) —specifically, Maronites suffering at the hands of Druze and Ottoman Muslims. However, Estela Valverde (1992) insists that “Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims [from Greater Syria] all share the same historical memory” (p. 314). Regardless of faith or practice, all Syro-Lebanese emigrants supposedly believed themselves to be the victim of some sort of (religious) oppression and violence. Perhaps there is some truth to this. Charles Issawi (1992) explains that “[i]n the first few decades of the nineteenth century, geographical Syria, including Lebanon, was the scene of many regional and international conflicts” (p. 13).

In 1839, the Ottoman Empire instated major reforms in attempts to quell nationalist and sectarian tendencies, as well as shore up weakening borders. This period was known as the *Tanzimat* (Reorganization). Among other changes, Sultan Abdul Mejid “granted full religious and judicial equality to all citizens regardless of religion”, “declared that military service would henceforth take in all Ottoman subjects”, and “promised that taxation would be according to financial capacity and within the limits of the law” (Hershlag, 1964, p. 31). Additionally, the *Hatt-i Serif of Gulhane*<sup>6</sup> attempted to mitigate corruption, reform the educational, legal, and institutional systems, decriminalize homosexuality, and promote Ottoman nationalism. Such moves were intended to mostly integrate non-Muslim and non-Turkish imperial citizens through greater civil liberties and equal status before the law. However, contrary to the theory that pits Muslims and Druze against Christians under Ottoman rule (Fawaz, 1994; Angold, 2006; Sorenson, 2009; Firro, 1992), Ussama Makdisi says that divisions within the Ottoman Empire prior to the Reorganization period existed more along the lines of educated and uneducated. In “Corrupting the Sublime Sultanate: The Revolt of Tanyus Shahin in Nineteenth-

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<sup>6</sup>The Hatt-i Serif of Gulhane (or Hatt-i Sharif of Gulhane) of 1839 is translated as “Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber”. According to Victor Roudometof (2001) in *Nationalism, Globalization and Orthodoxy: The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans*, the edict guaranteed all Ottoman subjects “security of life, honor, and property” regardless of religion (p. 84). Trials were also to be made public, confiscation was to be outlawed, taxation was to be systemized and military conscription put in place (p.84).

Century Ottoman Lebanon” he says, “...in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon was demarcated at the most basic level by the distinction between supposedly knowledgeable elites and ignorant commoners. Knowledge and ignorance were the metaphors that defined political and social relations” (Makdisi, 2000, p. 183). Makdisi (200) reasons that, therefore, Druze and Maronites of the same class maintained their class loyalties (as opposed to pledging allegiance to their respective religious categories), so long as neither side made attempts to proselytize, for religion was a private matter.

Eventually, the Tanzimat lost much of its administrative efficacy following the Crimean War between the Russian Empire on one side, and the Kingdom of Sardinia, the allied British, Ottoman and French empires on the other. The Charter of 1856 granted greater sovereignty for minority groups within the Ottoman Empire, which then strengthened both the political and economic power of the Christian middle class. By contrast, Muslims gained little either politically or economically. The inhabitants of Lebanon reshuffled and realigned allegiances as the new order ran against the Tanzimat's declaration of equality among all Ottoman subjects. Capitalizing on the confusion, the French promised protection to the Maronites and the British courted the Druze. Ottoman officials claimed neutrality. At the suggestion of the European powers, Lebanon was partitioned into Druze and Maronite sections, a division which would only serve to heighten existing tensions.

In 1859, a Maronite named Tanyus Shahin led what would become known as the Keserwan uprising against the ruling elite (both Druze and Maronite) on charges of “excessive taxation and onerous customs” (Makdisi, 2000, p. 197). Embittered peasants sacked and burned local sheikhs' property after demands for equality between the classes had gone unmet. The revolt exposed fault lines along Druze and Maronite alliances, where distinct identities for both religious groups further congealed. The very first acts of unrest were characterized as “random and unpredictable enough to seem more the acts of lawless men than a calculated war against other sects” (Fawaz, 1994, p. 47). As the clashes moved south, however, they became more deliberate in nature.

What began as a religiously diverse and tolerant society under Ottoman rule spiraled into a country riddled with religious conflict. Strictly peasant uprisings



against feudal lords in the north later deteriorated into communal fighting. By the time the conflicts spread south they had metamorphosed into rifts between Maronites and Druze, which resulted in high Christian losses. The Druze emerged victorious; Maronites suffered some 20,000 casualties and subsequently fled for the coast (Issawi, 1992, p. 21).<sup>7</sup>

Akram Khater (2001) counters the argument of religious persecution as a plausible major push-factor for emigration from Greater Syria—at least partially. He states that early Syro-Lebanese immigrants to Argentina—who were mostly Maronite—exaggerated the myth of religious strife in order to garner sympathy while attempting to build a Maronite community in the *mahjar* (Arab diaspora) (p. 49). During the nineteenth century, Maronite intellectuals and elites pushed to form a Maronite nation, and to do so required spinning a tale of “defenseless victims of persecution, oppressed by ruthless 'Turks' who extorted money from them” (p. 49). Khater believes the intention was to win Western support, and considers such strategies to have worked. Maronite claims were frequently validated in Western-published articles written by missionaries returning from Lebanon (p. 49). He goes on to write that “documents from the Ottoman archives show that Ottoman policy toward the Lebanese in general, and toward their emigration in particular, were hardly uniform or oppressive” (p. 49). Furthermore, the tone and agenda of the Ottoman administration in Mount Lebanon changed with governors, who did not enjoy a monopoly on power. European interference and local politics had considerably diminished the grip they had on the populations they governed (p. 50).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, instead of fleeing Greater Syria for religious strife, Akram Khater (2001) proffers the idea that “[p]eople...left for the Americas because they could and because they wanted a better life” (p. 53). And “a better life” often meant greater economic possibilities. Charles Issawi and Ignacio Klich attribute Syro-Lebanese departure from Greater Syria to economic conditions, too. Several factors in particular

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7 See Maroun Kisirwani's “Foreign Interference and Religious Animosity in Lebanon” for greater detail on the potential motives behind mid-nineteenth century conflicts between Maronites and Druze.

8 While this theory addresses potential inaccurate portrayals of Ottoman leadership and treatment of the Maronite community in Greater Syria, it does not broach the reasons behind the very real conflicts between Druze and Maronites, and how such religious strife impacted early Syro-Lebanese emigration.

made livelihood in the region difficult, including the Egyptian withdrawal from Greater Syria under Ibrahim Pasha, plummeting international prices on agricultural produce, a silk industry in distress, waning importance of land routes due to the construction of the Suez Canal and low agricultural productivity (Issawi, 1992, p. 23; Klich, 1992, p. 246). It was during this time that the population also swelled massively as famine disappeared, death rates fell, and birth rates rose from improved hygienic conditions. These push-factors in tandem provided much incentive to migrate to less crowded, more prosperous destinations (Issawi, 1992, p. 23).

But social factors played an equally crucial role in early Syro-Lebanese migration. Issawi (1992) cites four in particular: urbanization, education, conscription, and the formation of a middle class (p. 27). He theorizes that the growth and brilliance of such Greater Syrian cities as Beirut, Tripoli, Ba'albak, Sayda, and Zahleh enticed these populations to look elsewhere for even more excitement and abundant economic opportunities. Higher levels of education likewise incited emigration, as regular contact with French, Brits, Russians and Americans piqued curiosities about the outside world (p. 29). For a newly formed middle class with ties to a broader world through agriculture and commerce, changes on the international scene further inspired outward movement. Finally, economic crises at home due to global economic fluctuations could have pushed wealthier Syro-Lebanese to look for fortune elsewhere (p. 29).

### ***The Nature of Buenos Aires and the Creation of a Commission for Immigration***

The capital of the country to which many early Syro-Lebanese immigrants arrived was highly urban, very cosmopolitan and quite frenetic. Argentina was formed after the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata declared independence from Spain on July 9, 1816. Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia then separated, and what was left became Argentina—South America's second largest country after Brazil. Most Syro-Lebanese immigrants arrived to Argentina via the South Atlantic Ocean on the eastern coast. To the west, north, and northeast then, are Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay, respectively.

Prior to 1853, Buenos Aires the port city was capital only to the province of Buenos Aires (there are 23 provinces in total), and had approximately 663,854

inhabitants (Wilson, 1999, p. 18). Between 1853 and 1860, it was chosen as the capital of the entire state of Argentina. In 1880, it was federalized and made the seat of the republic's government. (From 1996 the government granted the city autonomy, to be known thereafter as *Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* (the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires) (Foster, 1998, p. 3).) From 1880 until 1887 was a period of significant development, as the capital's first mayor Torcuato de Alvear modernized and beautified the city with paved streets, newly planted trees and expanded avenues (Wilson, 1999, p. 26). As a result of two economic booms (1884-1889 and 1905-1912), by 1910 the capital had reached metropolitan status (p. 19). David William Foster (1999) says in *Buenos Aires: Perspectives on the City and Cultural Production*, that the autonomous capital of Argentina became “the major commercial center of Latin America and the major cultural center of the Spanish-speaking countries of the region” (p. 1). Mexican philosopher, José Vasconcelos's quote echoes a popular sentiment on the metropolis in this age: “[B]ut day by day, Buenos Aires is turning into the center of Iberoamerican thought; Buenos Aires is our Paris, the capital of our America” (as cited in Wilson, 1998, p. 7).

Much before Buenos Aires capital became a world-class city, however, the province of Buenos Aires created a commission for immigration in 1824 in the name of national progress, in order “to make Argentina's vast territory agriculturally productive” (Civantos, 2006, p. 6). This initial immigration project particularly targeted Northern European immigrants, although most who entered Argentina's borders came from Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean countries or the Middle East. In 1826, Argentina's first president Bernadino Rivadavia even offered “free passages, free land and start-up money” in expectation of his ideal immigrants, a political trend that would ebb and flow with changing presidencies (Wilson, 1998, p. 19). But it was the explosive impact of Argentina's new railroads connecting the capital to the fertile interior during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that set the country's economy in motion, solidified Buenos Aires' status as an economic heavyweight and impacted the direction of Argentina's immigration patterns (p. 26).

What began as an initiative to provide labor in agriculture metamorphosed into a project to supply labor wherever there was demand. Klich (1992) says, “a country which had neither exported wheat nor frozen and chilled beef before the 1870s sought

to increase its work-force with foreigners” (p. 243). Argentina soon offered a plethora of work opportunities in salting and freezing plants, Buenos Aires Customs and the newly Native-American free *pampas*<sup>9</sup> for cattle and sheep farming (Wilson, 1998, p. 19). Eventually, workers from abroad responded to the immigration call. Jean DeLaney (1997) says that prior to 1880, few immigrants (especially Europeans) saw largely empty and uncultivated Argentina as a beckoning host. But with “new political stability, technological advances, the end of the Indian wars, and surging European demand for imported food,” manifold opportunities for prosperity created a powerful pull to which immigrants responded (DeLaney, 1997). From 1895 until 1912, Argentina's population doubled from 3,954,911 to 7,570,400—some 6.5 million of whom were immigrants (Wilson, 1998, p. 19). By 1914, four-fifths of Argentina's population was of immigrant background, with most immigrants pouring in from Spain and Italy (p. 19). Instead of moving on to agricultural areas farther north and west, however, the majority remained in Buenos Aires.

### ***On the Other Side: Why Buenos Aires?***

Many Syro-Lebanese who landed in Argentina went with intentions to “hacer(se) la(s) América(s)”, much the same as other immigrants.<sup>10</sup> Many of these migrants often left village life as agricultural laborers and peasants in Greater Syria to pick up jobs in Buenos Aires in commerce—and to a lesser extent, industry.<sup>11</sup> In the beginning waves of immigration “hacer America” for the Syro-Lebanese usually translated into hawking: selling “buttons and lace, thread and needles, crosses and mementos from the ‘Holy Land’” out of a *kashshi* (a trunk used for hawking, and a term derived from the Portuguese word *caixa*, meaning box (Khater, 2001, p. 72; Rowe, 2010, p. 39). Yet, peddling was feasible for early immigrants as it “did not require a great deal of

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<sup>9</sup> The plains encompassing the Rio de la Plata estuary.

<sup>10</sup> The term “hacer la América” refers to the phenomenon by which those migrants to North and South America “made it big” financially. They took advantage of lucrative work opportunities to amass wealth in their new home, opportunities such as in 1900s agriculture in Argentina or the oil industry in the United States.

<sup>11</sup> Many Syrian-Lebanese immigrants arrived to the port of Buenos Aires and continued north and west, to cities such as Tucuman, Rosario and Cordoba. Foster says “many Middle Eastern immigrants settled [in the west] because of geographic similarity to their homelands” (Foster 12).

capital, training or skill” (Khater, 2001, pp. 75,78). Other factors, such as a lack of general support from Argentine state and society, a desire to rapidly accumulate wealth, and challenges with procuring land may have also influenced a decision to peddle, although peddling was often poorly viewed (Jozami, 1996, p. 70). Peddlers had a reputation for being dishonest, because fewer expenses allowed them to undercut competing shop owners' prices (Valverde, 1992, p. 317).

Still, the opportunities of hawking in Buenos Aires expedited upward mobility among the Syro-Lebanese. Civantos quotes Carl Solberg in saying that, 'Levantine immigrants in Argentina experienced spectacular economic success after 1900. By 1910 the so-called Turcos owned at least 6,900 businesses scattered throughout the republic' (as cited by Civantos, 2006, p. 9). Most began as itinerant salesman, who then went on to own their own shops. Today many still maintain small businesses, such as restaurants and dance schools. While conducting fieldwork in Buenos Aires, on a number of occasions I chose a neighborhood to explore on foot with the expectation of finding hidden (or conspicuous) Syro-Lebanese presence. In this way alone, I found nearly half a dozen restaurants in addition to those I had found through an online search using Google, the online Yellow Pages, and Guía Óleo.<sup>12</sup>

As well as small business owners, Klich (1992) reminds us that “[m]any Arab-descended politicians became legislators, governors, mayors and cabinet members, and some of the children of Syro-Lebanese immigrants pursued careers in the armed forces. Argentines of Middle Eastern parentage also joined the foreign service” (p. 254). A number of Syro-Lebanese have even gone on to become involved in politics or major industry. Such is the case with former Argentine President, Carlos Menem of Syrian background; Juan Luis Manzur, surgeon and former Minister of Health and Environment; and Daniel Hadad, a successful businessman in media and telecommunications (Civantos, 2006, p. 7).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Not all turned out to be Lebanese, however. Most were generally “Middle Eastern” places, one a Syrian eatery, another a Palestinian restaurant, another Armenian.

<sup>13</sup> Other well-known Argentines of Lebanese and/or Syro-Lebanese descent include former and current footballers Omar Asad, Julio Asad, Claudio Husain, Dario Husain, Antonio Mohamed, Sergio Aguero (several of whom were nicknamed “El Turco” for their Arab origins); model Yamila Diaz; Alberto Hassan, folkloric tenor; Carlos Bala, children's actor; and Elias Sapag, Felipe Sapag, and Luz Sapag, all

But the possibility of making a fortune was not the only beckoning aspect of Buenos Aires and Argentina, nor the reason for why some Syro-Lebanese immigrated to the South American country. Valverde (1992) says “[m]any of [the immigrants] left Lebanon with the aim of migrating to the United States and ended up in Argentina. Others came to Argentina attracted by relatives who had arrived before, starting a chain migration process that lasted several decades” (p. 314). The Syro-Lebanese further found incentive in low travel fares from the Ottoman Empire to South America, suasion by the Argentine government promoting immigration, and less stringent health tests required by the Argentinean state than by other governments, such as that of the United States. Frequently those who did not meet the United States' health demands instead headed south (Klich, 1992, p. 269-270).<sup>14</sup>

### *Assimilating in the Name of Progress*

However, what did starting over mean for the Syro-Lebanese population in a rapidly developing country chock-full of immigrants—especially, when as a group they did not fit the Anglo-Saxon prototype, and were even pegged as undesirable and unable to easily adapt to Argentine culture (Klich, 1992, p. 253)? The previous section states that “[m]ost mid-nineteenth century Argentine statesmen believed that Argentine progress depended upon populating the country with Europeans” (Civantos, 2006, p. 5). More specifically, Northern Europeans—who could successfully cultivate Argentina's plentiful virgin soil. According to intellectuals such as Juan Bautista Alberdi, Anglo-Saxons were “identified with the steamship, with commerce, and with liberty, and it [would] be impossible to establish these things...without the active cooperation of that progressive and cultivated race” (DeLaney, 1997). Yet, what began in 1824 as an immigration project endeavoring to attract mostly Anglo-Saxons for what was perceived as their superior work ethic, later deteriorated into an initiative

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politicians from the same family.

<sup>14</sup> The Lebanese diaspora is huge. Within South America, Lebanese immigrated to Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela in the most significant numbers. There are also Lebanese populations in Ghana, Australia, the Ivory Coast, the United States, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Germany and many, many other countries.

with aims to mainly whiten the population and atone for remaining *mestizos*<sup>15</sup> and *criollos*<sup>16</sup> (Civantos, 2006, p. 6).<sup>17</sup> Discussing the ways in which early Syro-Lebanese adapted to Argentine society requires examination of two key intellectual movements in Argentina during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Positivism and cultural nationalism shaped the political, cultural, and social climates of the times—and often colored Argentine society's attitude toward the immigrant, which in turn, impacted the ways in which the Syro-Lebanese created “home” abroad in Argentina.

### ***The Positivist Intellectual Tradition***

As the preeminent intellectual movement of the country from the 1880s until the start of the 1900s, positivism in Argentina developed as a derivative of the loosely defined European positivist movement founded by Auguste Comte, and further expanded by Emile Durkheim, Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, et. al.

Positivism is fundamentally a philosophy in direct response to the metaphysical ideas of the Enlightenment, one which posits that authentic knowledge can only be the product of rigorous empirical observation and logical treatments. Generally, reliance upon the scientific method supplants the use of intuition, with an aim to explain and predict scientific outcomes. Positivism as applied to a burgeoning Argentina meant “that national leaders should eschew abstract political principles in order to develop—through observation and experimentation—policies and institutions in tune with the peculiarities of their societies” (DeLaney, 1997). DeLaney (2002) provides the following perspective on positivists in “Imagining 'El Ser Argentino': Cultural

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15 A South American of mixed heritage, usually Native American and European.

16 A person of Spanish-speaking America of pure European descent, usually Spanish.

17 My research indicates that although this quote is true, it conflates the general understanding of “race” in Argentina from the time of the establishment of the republic, until the mid-twentieth century. Consider DeLaney's point that the term race during the mid-nineteenth century “was cultural and historical, rather than biological,” meaning that individuals were not racially different “because of inherited or genetic qualities...but because they belonged to different cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions” (DeLaney, 1997). Thus, Juan Bautista Alberdi and others championed the immigration of Anglo-Saxons—as DeLaney says—“not to improve the genetic stock of the national population, but to help transform the work habits and customs of this native population” (1997). Racism as it applies to discrimination on the basis of biological factors began in the later decades of the nineteenth century as there was a rise in the “growing interest in racialist theories as a way of understanding the continent's backwardness vis-à-vis Europe” (1997).

## Nationalism and Romantic Concepts of Nationhood in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina”:

[T]hey did share a general faith in science and the belief that the scientific method could be applied to the study of human societies...[which] they saw as an evolving organism that passed through set, pre-determined stages of development. These stages were predictable and the same for all societies, but positivists believed the progress of individual societies along this path differed. To gain a deeper understanding of a given society, it was necessary to eschew theory and all a priori knowledge in favour of either direct observation or the search for objective historical facts. Equipped with empirical evidence, Argentine positivists believed it would be possible to ascertain the underlying laws that governed a society's particular development, and then to devise political institutions and social policies appropriate to its particular needs (p. 643).

There are two key points in DeLaney's description of positivist logic worth noting: one, every society possesses a unique character which must be directly observed and classified (most satisfactorily by the scientific method); and two, with the peculiar character of a nation ascertained, proper political institutions must be set in place to guide society towards peak development. More explicitly, well-calculated and deliberate steps ensure appropriate development at every stage in order to achieve the greatest possible level of advancement.

Positivism equated a society's unique character with its national identity. Arturo Ardao (1963) explains that “[t]he positivists of the '80's became the protagonists of a national conscience, a positivism which provided the Argentinean mind with the ideology to perform the extensive task of organizing a nationality” (p. 7). But in observing and uncovering a national Argentinean identity, what was the immigrant's place? Where could positivism situate the millions of Mediterraneans, Middle Easterners, Eastern Europeans, and others whom obviously were not the Northern European immigrants these intellectuals thought would promote hard work and innovation? In what ways did the Syro-Lebanese immigrant show up in this dialogue?

In keeping with the scientific method, positivists went about classifying the people of Argentina. DeLaney (2002) asserts that “[r]ace became a central element in Argentine theorising about national character and destiny”, where “race” in the positivist intellectual discourse referred to disparate linguistic, cultural, and religious



traditions, as opposed to biological differences among peoples (p. 645). Civantos takes a slightly different stance, however: “Positivism's reliance on natural science approaches led to an insistence on conceptions of ethnic, racial, and biological difference” (Civantos, 2006, p. 8). And more importantly, differences that were perceived as “natural, given, inescapable, and therefore moral” (Mead, 1997, p. 646). What then, were the repercussions of such categorizations for immigrants—once classified, where did positivism position the non-Anglo-Saxon immigrant in the conversation on national identity, and in wider Argentine society?

Whether biologically, culturally and/or ethnically divergent, Argentine positivists cast the non-Northern European immigrant in the role of the “other”; at times considering him or her as “an inferior, diseased, and contaminating presence” within society, a social malaise to be treated (Civantos, 2006, p. 8). Yet, because of Argentine positivism's loosely defined nature, intellectuals differed in their opinions on how to manage the “other” in the task of nation and national identity building. Some espoused a pseudo-democratic political system, whereby the state composed of “enlightened elite” would impose rule rather than govern, and “citizens would contribute to the general welfare... without challenging established political practices” (DeLaney, 1997). Argentina's national government from 1880 until 1916 was precisely so. The Autonomous National Party steered election outcomes through “patronage, intimidation, and fraud,” all in the name of “order and progress” (1997). As DeLaney explains,

The modern nation was, in their view, a political association based on citizenship rather than an ethnocultural community based on putative ethnic traits. Thus constructing the Argentine nation, they believed, was not a matter of fortifying Argentine culture, religion, language, or traditions, or of cultivating a mythic past—far from it. Rather, since this past was seen as an obstacle to nation building, creating the nation consisted of instilling in the Argentine people a common set of political beliefs that would bind them together (1997).

Conversely, other positivists embraced more romantic notions of an organic and unique national Argentine identity that should have been allowed to develop in the absence of heavy-handed political institutions—a sentiment vaguely foreshadowing future cultural nationalist ideals. Eventually, Argentine positivism gave way to Argentine cultural nationalism well into the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century.

### ***The Cultural Nationalist Intellectual Tradition***

Cornell and Hartmann (1998) present nationalism as “the expressed desire of a people to establish and maintain a self-governing political entity” (p. 34). Paul M. Johnson qualifies this definition by asserting that the political community resulting from a people’s desire for self-determination is a natural phenomenon, such that “the nation and the state [are] co-extensive” and the people “have become conscious of their national identity” (A Glossary of Political Economy Terms, 2005; Williams, 1999, p. 7). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy extends this claim on national identity by positing that nationalism is “the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012). Lynn Williams (1999), in her essay entitled “National Identity and the Nation State: Construction, Reconstruction and Contradiction”, cautions us that there is no consensus on what constitutes national identity. For some, it is a question of territory, race, language or religion; for others, it is a matter of what members *feel* to be the lines of demarcation for the national category to which they pledge allegiance (p. 7). By contrast, Anthony Smith (1991) recognizes “the complex and abstract nature of national identity”, but outlines five fundamental features which, he argues, are its basis (National Identity, p. 14). Smith states that if we work from Western nationalists’ assumptions that nations are territorially bounded, share a common mass culture, grant members reciprocal rights and duties under a legal system, and have some sort of production system, then national identity entails a homeland or historic territory, a common mass culture, a common economy, common historical memories and common legal rights and duties for all the nation’s members. For Smith, national identity is “multi-dimensional”, and can never be whittled down to one factor alone (p. 14).

From this foundation then, we can establish that national identity is the way in which a group of people comprising an “imagined community”<sup>18</sup> (often corresponding

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<sup>18</sup> “Imagined community” is a phrase coined by Benedict Anderson in his 1991 work entitled *Imagined*

to geo-political borders) finds or constructs a powerful overarching commonality—be it a shared language, ethnicity, history, political orientation, heritage, culture, or a combination of these—such that they seek self-determination. For prominent cultural nationalists, such as Manuel Gálvez, Ricardo Rojas, Mario Bravo, Ernesto Mario Barreda, and Emilio Ortiz Grogne, Argentinean national identity equaled the burgeoning Argentine race. In this intellectual tradition, as in positivism, race was most often “cultural and historical rather than biological...a term denot[ing] a people bound together by common historical memory, language, shared mental and emotional traits” (DeLaney, 1997). Cultural nationalist Arturo O'Connor opined that “[r]ace [was] nationality,” which determined “political evolution, sociability, religion, philosophy, science, art, morality, history and traditions” of a people (1997). However, DeLaney (1997) says that the ways in which “individual thinkers defined the putatively emerging [Argentine] race and what qualities they privileged—shared descent, language, religion, personality traits—varied enormously”. For instance, Manuel Gálvez defined the Argentine race as Latin, and more explicitly, Spanish. Rojas believed the Argentinean race to be a steadily developing amalgam of European and autochthonous characteristics, which would culminate in a civilization he called “Eurindia” (1997). How leading cultural nationalists of the time chose to define the emerging Argentine race would affect which immigrants were absorbed or marginalized in wider Argentine society, and thus, immigration “was at the heart of the debate as to who constituted the true Argentine” (Wilson, 1999, p. 27).

Some cultural nationalists “shared a belief that foreign influences and the growing immigrant population posed a threat to the nation” (DeLaney, 2002, p. 625). In the face of cosmopolitanism, cultural nationalist Manuel Gálvez championed a return to the nation's Spanish roots, a return to “traditional Argentine virtues such as honesty, *desinterés* [selflessness], and spirituality” (DeLaney, 1997). Ethnically, the overpowering immigrant presence challenged even the most elemental construction of an Argentine nationality based on shared ethnic traits. So diverse was Buenos Aires

that at times in literature it was likened to a “Babel city” (Wilson, 1999, p. 8). The foreigner arrived to the republic “speaking foreign tongues, wearing unusual clothes, eating different foods, and engaging in all sorts of novel (and threatening) behavior such as labor organizing” (DeLaney, 1997).

Argentine society mirrored the anxiety some cultural nationalists felt. As early as 1882 Victor Gálvez lamented, “Argentines do not have their own identity, being an assimilation of people from everywhere, every kind of custom...there are no national characteristics, no nation-people, they are fragments of many people” (as cited in Wilson, 1999, p. 9). In 1886, Argentinean novelist Julián Martel bemoaned “the cosmopolitanism that is taking on such grand proportions with us, to the point that we do not know who we are, whether French or Spanish, Italian or English” (p. 8).

But the immigrant presumably threatened more than just national identity. Argentine elites also suspected immigrants for their unfamiliar political activities. Notorious for their lack of formal political participation in favor of “hacer”-ing la América—so much so that Vicente Blasco once remarked that the name Buenos Aires made “all the desperate people in the world dream”—immigrants made up the urban working and burgeoning middle classes (as cited in Wilson, 1999, p. 9). They were what Wilson terms “a new urban proletariat, organized into unions, with socialists, communists, and anarchist elements” (p. 27). Immigrants were suspected of being “avatars of radical, foreign ideologies and as carriers of racially inferior genes” (DeLaney, 1997). In short, Argentines feared social unrest fomented by immigrants arriving with unwelcome ideas (and genotypes).

In contrast to those who viewed immigration as contamination of the Argentine nationality, a minority of intellectuals “argued the immigrant would help shape the character of the new race” (DeLaney, 1997). As the Argentine nationality was still malleable, “it would be the contribution of working-class immigrants that would provide the Argentine personality with its distinctive qualities” (1997). Poet Almafuerte writes of “the beautiful blond beast that Nietzsche speaks of” taking shape out of the “Babel” that is Argentina (and Buenos Aires as a microcosm of the republic). He predicts that it will occur “thanks to the fusion of the bloodlines, the atavisms, the degenerations, the histories, the diverse origins that now clash...and repel each other” (as cited in DeLaney, 1997). For him, Argentina “is a frightful

hurley-burley that will endure for...generations until it constitutes an organism [with a] clearly drawn body [and an] obvious, characteristic race” (1997). Leopoldo Marechal also embraces the melting-pot of Argentina in his 1948 novel *Adán Buenosayres*. In a Buenos Aires street scene he includes characters representing the sea of immigrant nationalities present in the capital, from Basques and Andalusians, to Neapolitans, Turks, Jews and Greeks, to Japanese, Dalmations and Syro-Lebanese (as cited in Wilson, 1999, p. 7).

In the same vein, a healthy number of cultural nationalists and Argentines reckoned immigration inevitable. That if it could not be halted, immigrants would conditionally become an integral piece in the evolving Argentine race. Yet, an acceptance of immigration as inevitable did not automatically mean the end of anti-immigrant sentiments. DeLaney (1997) reminds us that

cultural nationalists and their sympathizers accepted, albeit at times begrudgingly, that immigration was inevitable and believed that the incoming masses should be assimilated or "Argentinized" as completely as possible. For these individuals...cultural nationalism represented a means of integrating the immigrant into the national community without disrupting existing political practices or social hierarchies. What cultural nationalism offered Argentines was a nation-building project based on the evolution of a putative Argentine race, rather than on political participation and the civic incorporation of immigrants.

What were the implications of equating race and nationality for the less-desirable immigrant generally, and the Syro-Lebanese particularly? DeLaney argues that in most nations with high rates of immigration, ethnicity cannot be the basis for nationality.<sup>19</sup> Once ethnicity becomes central to national identity, the foreigner is never fully integrated into society (DeLaney, 1997).<sup>20</sup> Civantos echoes these concerns when she poses the questions: “If one is considered part of a nation by origin—by language, culture, or ethnicity...[w]hat occurs...in a case such as Argentina's in which

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<sup>19</sup> In current academic terms, race and ethnicity are not the same. (See chapter two for a discussion of their differences.) However, because cultural nationalists saw race as “cultural and historical, rather than biological,” this understanding of the term most closely corresponds to the present-day's accepted definition of ethnicity.

<sup>20</sup> For an interesting discussion on what constitutes nationality in the modern world, see the BBC's “On Air: How Do you Define Nationality?” at <http://worldhaveyoursay.wordpress.com/2008/08/26/on-air-how-do-you-define-nationality/>. It is part of its “World Have Your Say” segment.

immigrant assimilation is the means of forming the bulk of the national community—when the national subject is not necessarily born an Argentine, but becomes one?”(Civantos, 2006, p. 156). The operative word in Civantos's inquiry is “assimilation”. Rather than relegating the “other” to the fringes of Argentine society, cultural nationalists and subsequently, the Argentine state and society during this period sought to mold the immigrant to fit their vision of the ideal Argentine race (DeLaney, 1997). Assimilation and discrimination were the primary tools.

### ***Discrimination and Assimilation Against the Syro-Lebanese in Argentina***

Klich says the pervasive anti-foreigner sentiment—which did not “spare Spaniards and Italians”—was considerably more vitriolic towards the “least desirable” immigrants (Klich, 1992, p. 261). “Least desirable” usually referred to “Semitic immigrants—whether Christian Arabs, Eastern European Jews, Muslim Arabs, or Arab Jews” (Civantos, 2006, p. 8). This deprecating categorization had the most profound impact on the ways in which the Syro-Lebanese adapted to Argentine society. According to Carl Solberg, Argentines in the early 1900s looked upon Syrian, Jewish, and other immigrants from the Middle East “with a dislike approaching disgust” (p. 9). Civantos says newspaper articles at this time frequently condemned these groups as “inherently disease-ridden, immoral, and lazy”, persons who “had deteriorated biologically to such low levels that they could contribute nothing to the improvement of the mestizo” (p. 9). Government officials sometimes echoed these racist sentiments using harsh descriptions for Arabs, such as “dirty and ragged”, unrepresentative of “an efficient socio-economic factor”, a people who contributed minimally to national consumption, and whose production was even less (Klich, 1992, p. 262).

In addition to verbal attacks, the Argentinean state openly discriminated against immigrants from the Middle East. Juan Bautista Alberdi, a prominent liberal of Generation '37,<sup>21</sup> a political theorist and proponent of immigration to Argentina for

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<sup>21</sup> Civantos says, “[t]he Generation of '37 was a group of young writers and intellectuals who held in common the desire to rid the Argentine provinces of Rosas and the caudillo system in general” (Civantos, 2006, p. 33).

the nationalist project, at one time advised refusal of entry to those immigrants from Asia, Africa and—what he deemed—less favorable regions of Europe (Klich, 1992, p. 260). No formal legislation was ever created to specifically ban Arab immigrants' entry to Argentina; yet in 1910, the Senate passed a resolution to require more stringent immigration legislation to, as Klich suggests, “among other things...deny entry to the Syro-Lebanese” (as cited in Civantos, 2006, p. 12). Instead, Arab immigrants were denied entry to Argentina on such grounds as carrying trachoma. Some Argentine consulates abroad were also instructed to restrict “unwanted immigration” by way of reference to Article 3 of Law 817, which “restrict[ed] 'dissolute or useless immigration'” (Civantos, 2006, p. 12). And if “undesirable” foreigners were suspected of militancy or fomenting unrest, they could have been deported under either the Residence Law of 1902 or the Law of Social Defense of 1910 (DeLaney, 1997).

What is more, the Argentine government did not subsidize Syro-Lebanese emigrants' travel from Lebanon, did not offer them accommodation at the Immigrants' Hotel upon arrival to Argentina, or free passage to their final destination once in country (Klich, 1992, p. 268). However, such services were afforded Italian, Spanish, German, and other European migrants by the Migration and Colonization Law No. 817. It was not until 1939 that the Syro-Lebanese could actually use facilities for Europeans, because immigration by then had slowed down considerably (p. 315). Civantos (2006) also notes that “[t]he benefit of equal protection under the law was also routinely denied to the Syro-Lebanese” (p. 11). She explains that the number of murders of Arabic speakers in Argentina increased in the early 1900s, and the perpetrators of these homicides were often given impunity (p. 11).

Where the Argentine state did not discriminate against the Syro-Lebanese, it employed assimilationist policies to force cultural integration. Argentine assimilation was predicated on the notion that “an ethnocultural community equated nationality with a bundle of cultural or ethnic characteristics” (DeLaney, 1997). Foreigners could not pledge their allegiance to the nation through a political commitment, such as the

process of naturalization. Instead, they had to acquire Argentine-ness, assuming the unique and organic “spirit” of the land. DeLaney says, “Argentinization entailed a process more akin to a spiritual transformation by which the immigrant became—through some mystical process—bound to the nation” (1997). Education to inculcate the foreigner was hardly “mystical”, yet “elites focused on patriotic education as a means of converting immigrants - or at least their children - into loyal Argentines” (DeLaney, 2002, p. 639).

The period during which positivist Ramos Mejía presided over the *Consejo Nacional de Educación* (National Council of Education) (1908-1912), Argentine schools utilized texts authored by Argentines only, adopted a daily pledge of allegiance, and frequently held civic festivals (DeLaney, 2002, p. 641). The newly adopted curriculum in schools focused on “Argentine history, the Spanish language, Argentine literature, Argentine geography, and moral instruction, and [sought] to inculcate in all immigrant children a love for the nation and an understanding of Argentine traditions” (DeLaney, 1997). Cultural nationalist Ricardo Rojas espoused such an educational reform, as he believed it to be “instrumental in the effort to 'define the national conscience' and bring about a 'real and fecund patriotism'” (1997). Valverde (1992) informs us that “all non-Spanish speaking migrants had to learn the language and forget their own” (p. 319). For many cultural nationalists, assimilation was the only acceptable way in which immigrants joined the Argentine race. A representative in the 1890 Congress of Argentina commented

I do not mean to say that foreigners should not come, but that respecting the national spirit, he should leave out the passions that he had there in the home country and that he should not come here to carry out double politics [;] we shall not consent to a man having two homelands [;] they should learn, when they choose the noble appellation of Argentine, that this homeland should be loved with exclusivism. (as cited in Civantos, 2006, p. 157)

### ***The Syro-Lebanese Response to Discrimination and Assimilation***

If we consult the work of Ignacio Klich (1992), collectively the Syro-Lebanese submitted gracefully to the two-fold pressure of conformity. Concerns that the “ferocious individual and barbarian” was incapable of bending to the will of the Argentine nation were unfounded (p. 267). Klich says Syro-Lebanese assimilation to Argentine society was rapid and successful, perhaps owing in part to the high number



of Christians arriving from Greater Syria, the high frequency of exogamous marriage, and Middle Easterners' resemblance to Mediterranean immigrants (p. 253). Valverde (1992) offers that “[t]he assimilationist policy made the migrants feel inadequate in their own ethnicity [and [t]o keep the external markers of ethnicity meant to keep their most obvious differences” (Klich, 1992, p. 253; Valverde, 1992, p. 320).

Thus, early immigrants translated, Romanized or approximated in Spanish their last names: *Habib* became *Amado*, *Harb* changed to *Guerra*, *Said* to *Felix*, or *Farah* to *Farías*. Muslims embraced Catholicism and baptized their children, giving rise to the term *católico musulmán* (Catholic-Muslim). Use of the Arabic language in the capital was slowly replaced with communication entirely in Spanish. Orthodox Christians attempted to downplay that priests within their faith could marry, and other churches changed their name to some version of a “Catholic” moniker, such as the Holy Eastern Orthodox Church of Antioch, which became the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch (Klich, 1992, pp. 255-258). *Iglesia San Marón* (the Church of Saint Maroun), which I visited during my research in Buenos Aires, is one of many *iglesias católicas maronitas* (Catholic Maronite churches) worldwide that grew out of the Maronite tradition in Lebanon. The church was founded by Saint Maroun at the end of the fourth century A.D.

But the Syro-Lebanese also took steps to create a sense of community and continuity of Greater Syrian culture and tradition in their host country. Scholar Albert Hourani (1992) says that

As the Lebanese communities grew, they began to generate their own needs: workshops and shops to import or produce the ingredients of the Lebanese cuisine, and Arabic newspapers and periodicals, published in Brooklyn, Sao Paulo or Buenos Aires, which gave news both of the 'old country' and of the new communities, and helped to create and maintain a separate identity in them. (p. 8)

Liliana Cazorla of Museo Roca in Buenos Aires states that “[w]hile the Spanish and Italian immigrant groups organized ethnic institutions shortly upon their arrival, the Syrian-Lebanese took some time” (p. 1). Once they did begin setting up cultural organizations, however, first they founded ethnic newspapers (e.g. *As-salam* and *Jaridat ar-rabita al-wataniya as-suriya*), and later civic societies for charity or joint aid, such as *Fundación Sirio Libanesa para la Salud* and *Hospital Sirio Libanés* (pp.

1-2). In 1928, the Syro-Lebanese community created the *Patronato Sirio-Libanés* (Syrian-Lebanese Board), which dealt with community issues and served as a liaison between the Syro-Lebanese group and greater Argentine society (Valverde, 1992, p. 315). During the early years, some of these organizations were the domain of men only. Syro-Lebanese women then founded their own organizations, such as *Damas de la Misericordia de San Marón* (Sisters of the Mercy of Saint Maroun) and *Asociación Ortodoxa Femenina de Beneficencia* (Women's Orthodox Association for Charity). Organizations also began exclusive to Syro-Lebanese immigrants, and later opened to the children and grandchildren of these members (Cazorla, p. 3). In addition to civic organizations, Syro-Lebanese newcomers could look to their settled counterparts for loans and apprenticeships in trades they would later take up as livelihood in Argentina. Sometimes the new foreigners were given merchandise along with a *kashshi* to sell in ambulatory occupations (Valverde, 1992, p. 315). Thus, why did the Syro-Lebanese assimilate? Klich (1992) perfectly captures the essence of this collective decision: “Assimilation would allow offspring to aspire to leadership of the country” (p. 253).

And what does it *really* mean to assimilate? The Syro-Lebanese assimilated to Argentine society by Romanizing and translating their last names, denying the use of Arabic and instead using Spanish and modifying their religious beliefs, among many other ways. These are the outward manifestations of assimilation. Yet, on a fundamental, personal level of identity, assimilation means distancing oneself from an ethnic discourse (to claim another or perhaps, none at all). Effectively, assimilation can be interpreted as the divorcing of oneself from an ethnicity one claimed once upon a time. What then, is ethnicity?

## Chapter Two: What is Ethnicity?

Examining ethnicity begs first defining the concept. In exploring how one forms an ethnic identity in a global context, I draw from theories by Max Weber, Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, Eugene E. Roosens, Fredrik Barth, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, among other social scientists. I conclude the theoretical tour ethnic identity with the assertion that identifying oneself in ethnic terms is not necessary—that other identities, such as nationality and race, may suffice. Prevalent racial/ethnic intermixing among members of a society or even a history of assimilation among an ethnic group can influence the ways in which one self-identifies. Members of the Lebanese Diaspora in Buenos Aires may experience feelings of loss, displacement and nostalgia, which inspire a strong enough emotional motive to claim Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity. Nevertheless, a city with a history of massive immigration and assimilationist policies, in conjunction with high rates of miscegenation may leave many members devoid of an emotional connection to Lebanon. They may lack any real interest or incentive in expressing Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity. I use Livio Sansone's study of Bahia, Brazil in *Blackness Without Ethnicity* as a guide.

### *Defining the Terms*

Ethnic identity is “a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one’s identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group...” (Trimble and Dickson). The operative word here is identity, which Zygmunt Bauman and Benedetto Vecchi (2004) acknowledge as “very evasive and slippery, almost an a priori” (p. 15). Stuart Hall (2000) addresses these complications when he offers his post-structuralist definition of the term:

I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which constrict us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject, positions which discursive practices construct for us (see Hall, 1995). They are the result of a successful articulation or 'chaining' of the subject into the flow of the discourse...[I]dentities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but

multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (p. 19)

According to Hall (2000), identity is the dynamic seam at which we align ourselves with external discourses on a plethora of stances: religion, diet, race, ethnicity, nationality, political ideology, gender, sex, age, occupation. Such external discourses can manifest as “veganism”, “Buddhism”, “Costa Rican-ism”, “intellectualism”, “libertarianism”, “male-ness”, “woman-ness”, “whiteness”. We can be attracted to these discourses or be the subject of their projections; yet for Hall, it is only at the point at which we simultaneously articulate our allegiance (wittingly or unwittingly) to these particular on-going conversations that constitutes “identity”. For example, one may have the identities of a thirty-something, Mexican-French, female and woman engineer, of libertarian political leanings and preferences for an organic, whole foods diet. These identities are precisely so because the subject has aligned herself with these particular discourses, and has, in some manner, indicated her subscription to them.<sup>22</sup> An indication of a subscription can be intentional or unintentional. By virtue of having an olive complexion and brown, wavy hair, one may unwittingly articulate allegiance to the dialogue surrounding the notion of being “Mediterranean”.

Within the same subject/performer identities are also often overlapping—or even contradictory. Hall (2000) says, “identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and

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<sup>22</sup> It is worth pointing out that we can have discourses projected on to us; but this does not constitute a step in identity-making. It is more a process of categorization, which does have an impact on how we identify ourselves. For instance, race can be a discourse (and never is the discourse exactly the same): a very simplistic idea of “blackness” in the United States can mean brown skin, a broad nose, coiled hair, full lips, “acting black”, innate rhythm, speaking Ebonics. On the contrary, elsewhere the basic conversation might be of poverty, music with beats rooted in Africa, samba, kinky hair, brown skin. To a large extent, our phenotype is not a choice. Thus, discourses such as race, that rely heavily on characteristics such as phenotype are often ones projected onto subjects, whether these subjects actively align with them or not. An Australian Aborigine may be the subject of an imposed “blackness” discourse, whether this is “accurate” or not.

positions” (p. 19). More explicitly, discourses and subscriptions to discourses can be in constant flux, both predicated on time and location. We could ponder: What was the conversation on being Lebanese immediately after the creation of the Lebanese state in 1943, when citizens had for so long considered themselves inhabitants of Greater Syria? What did it mean to be Lebanese after the Lebanese civil war, which lasted from 1975 until 1990? How does a dialogue on being Lebanese in Ghana compare with one on being from Lebanon, yet living in Australia? A subject/performer of an identity may subscribe to a discourse for a lifetime; yet, because this discourse changes due to time and place, the “suture” at which they meet (read: identity) can also change. In this light, ethnicity is a kind of identity, but how does it differ from any other way to attach oneself and perform allegiances to a discourse? And why does it merit its own study? Briefly recounting the evolution of the term is fundamental in answering these questions. I begin with Max Weber.

German sociologist Max Weber (1978) provides one of the earliest nods to the concept of ethnic identity. In *Economy and Society*, he introduces us to ethnic groups when he posits

We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration...[i]t does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. (p. 389)

There is notable distinction between an ethnic group and ethnic membership. For Weber, groups are intentionally cohesive units that exist for carrying out an agenda, such as political action. The action this group takes is dependent on group members' active knowledge of their participation. A membership, however, is by default inclusion in a line-up of other similar beings without any necessarily apparent cause. Ethnic memberships can serve as the basis for an ethnic group, which, for Weber, is a collective of people who believe they have a shared past that somehow manifests in common present-day physical attributes, social customs and/or historical memories. Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann (1998) in *Ethnicity and Race: Making*

*Identities in a Changing World* concur. A *shared past* implies group members are conscious of a particular point (or points) in history or genealogy from which the thread of their present ethnic identity runs (p. 17).

Eugeen E. Roosens (1989) adds that

An ethnic group is, first of all, a form of social organization in which the participants themselves make use of certain cultural traits from their past, a past which may or may not be verifiable historically. It may well be that, in certain cases, the actors impute these cultural traits to themselves...[c]ultural traits that are postulated as external emblems (clothing, language, etc.) or even as fundamental values (e.g. faithfulness in friendship) can thus be taken from one's own tradition or from other people's or simply may be created. (p. 12)

Like Weber, Roosens argues that a shared past is at the root of an ethnic group, and that this shared past manifests as present-day cultural traits. These common cultural markers which Roosens mentions—be they customs, behavior, phenotype, dress, etc.—echo Weber's suggestion that ethnic groups are “human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both” (Weber, 1978, p. 389). What is more, “[t]he cultural traits by which an ethnic group defines itself never comprise the totality of the observable culture but are only a combination of some characteristics that the actors ascribe to themselves and consider relevant. These traits can be replaced by others in the course of time” (Roosens, 1989, p. 12). That is, an ethnic group is not encased by a fixed set of evident cultural traits distinguishing it from other ethnic groups. Rather, the boundaries between ethnic groups, which are composed of cultural markers, are permeable and mutable. Ethnicity as a kind of identity is comprised of discourses which inevitably change over time.

Roosens further adds that the shared past of an ethnic group need not be real, or even attributable to the group which currently references it. For example, in the case of African-Americans, slavery is still a very specific and potent historical phenomenon that resides in collective African-American memory, and thus has the power to link together every descendant thereafter, as well as to the wider notion of being “African-American”. A link to this United States historical event helps create an ethnic identity that stands in contrast to other ethnicities also “black”, such as the

Jamaican-American ethnicity or even first generation “African”-American ethnicity, where the parents emigrate from Africa (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, p. 19). By contrast to an actual shared past, some pockets of African-Americans base their ethnic identity in part on (sometimes romantic) notions of perceived “African”-ness. Their ethnicity is a simulation of what it means to be from a specific (or sometimes more than one) place in Africa (much like what I postulate of the construction of Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity in Buenos Aires). The Atlantic slave trade often severed all ties to the “homeland”<sup>23</sup> linguistically, culturally and historically. Descendant generations of these early African immigrants to North America—who originated from various parts of Africa—therefore, in wanting to construct an ethnicity rooted in “African”-ness, sometimes pull distinctive piece-meal identity markers, often from disparate milieux: the dashiki, Swahili, the ankh, kente cloth, references to the Kingdom of Kush, historically Muslim names (popular in Muslim-majority African countries) and perhaps polemically, the Afro. All of these markers point to an often hazy “past” in collective African-American memory. Africa as a notion (and any symbols associated with Africa) represents a figurative past, because in the chronological movement of slaves across the Atlantic Ocean, “Africa” came before “America”. It does not matter that the specific ethnic markers of Africa that some African-Americans reference today may only be contemporary. This phenomenon illustrates Roosens' point that ethnicity need not stem from an actual shared past, yet, can be constructed from historical scratch (Roosens, 1989, p. 10).

Weber (1978) goes on to say that “[i]t does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists” among members of an ethnic group (p. 389). According to this understanding, ethnicity could be no more than social conditioning or indoctrination. Beyond being based on biological ties, ethnic identity is a belief, a feeling of belonging to a particular category for displaying certain attributable cultural

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23 I use “homeland” to refer to the continent of Africa, as slaves in the Atlantic slave trade were sold and taken from all over Africa (however, mainly from the West). Because many African-Americans do not know from where exactly their blood ties originated on the continent, ethnic markers from any African country are fair game. To read in greater depth on the Atlantic slave trade, Hugh Thomas' *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870* offers a very comprehensive examination.

traits. As Roosens (1989) argues, “nobody could maintain that ethnic identity is a 'feeling' that is determined by genes or by 'the blood'” (p. 16). It is doubtless ethnicity requires—on some level—conviction in the categorization, yet, is it enough to simply “feel” included in an ethnic group in order to claim its ethnicity, or to believe to be part of its shared past? This begs greater clarity: how does the relationship between an ethnic group and the world beyond its boundaries help to constitute its existence? Is ethnicity emic, etic, or both? Is it as Cornell and Hartmann claim (1998), that “[e]thnic groups are self-conscious populations; they see themselves as distinct” (p. 19)?

Much like Weber's distinction between ethnic group and ethnic membership, according to Cornell and Hartmann (1998), “[o]thers may assign to us an ethnic identity, but what they establish by doing so is an ethnic category. It is our own claim to that identity that makes us an ethnic group. The ethnic category is externally defined, but the ethnic group is internally defined” (p. 20). Although outsiders cannot establish an ethnic group by acknowledging the differences between themselves and the “other”, this backdrop of awareness is a necessary foil against which an ethnic group defines itself. Otherwise, it is like, as Bateson (1979) says, “the sound from one hand clapping” (p. 78). Roosens (1989) agrees: “Distinction should be made between ethnic organization of a group and the ethnic identification of individuals and, on the other hand, the so-called objective, perceivable, investigable culture by which the ethnic group was conceptually defined up until the late 1960s” (p. 12). Trimble and Dickson explain that “[e]thnic identity is usually contextual and situational because it derives from social negotiations where one declares an ethnic identity and then demonstrates acceptable and acknowledged ethnic group markers to others. One’s ethnic declaration often is open to the scrutiny of others who may validate or invalidate the declaration”.

But a word about boundaries: We must reiterate that ethnic boundaries are permeable and mutable. According to Fredrik Barth (1969) in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*,

...boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them...categorical



ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories (p. 9).

There are two critical points to take away from Barth's quote. First, ethnic groups are not rigid, and do not develop or exist in a vacuum. As Gregory Bateson (1979) says, "It takes at least two somethings to create a difference" (p. 78). Roosens (1989) may posit that acculturation erodes differences; however, new ones deliberately emerge in their place (p. 9). Cornell and Hartmann (1998) say that "[a]n ethnic group cannot exist in isolation[;] [i]t has meaning only in a context that involves others—ultimately, in a collection of peoples of which it is only a part" (p. 20). Second, an initial reading of Barth's quote may render an interpretation that ethnic boundaries are fixed, and it is the subjects/performers of ethnic identity who are not. Instead, they move in and out of lines of demarcation that never budge. Barth says that distinctions between ethnic categories arise from active social processes to exclude and incorporate other participants, participation turnover notwithstanding. Yet, ethnic identity is not only a "thing" delineated by people, it is not just a piece of surveyed land. If we reference Hall's (2000) post-structuralist definition of 'identity', we remember that "it is the meeting point...between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate'...and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which constrict us as subjects which can be 'spoken'" (p. 19). From this perspective, we can view ethnic identity as we would light according to the theory of quantum mechanics: it is both particle and wave. Ethnicity exists within and without people, at once impervious to time and place, yet also inextricably chained to it. It is this dual nature that allows the propagation of an ethnic identity through time and across distance, even when members of an ethnic group move in and out of its boundaries. Likewise, this duality gives flexibility to the expression of the ethnic identity itself, hence its mutable and permeable borders. Jean Phinney shares a similar understanding of ethnicity when she asserts that "[ethnic identity] is not a fixed categorization, but rather is a fluid and dynamic understanding of self and ethnic background. Ethnic identity is constructed and modified as individuals become aware of their ethnicity, within the large (sociocultural) setting" (as cited in Trimble and

Dickson). Likewise, Sansone (2003) offers that “[e]thnic identity is...a never-ending story”, and that “[p]erhaps one should use the term 'ethnicization', instead of ethnicity...which stresses that we are dealing with a dynamic rather than an entity” (p. 3).

But ethnic peripheries are not only the product of their subjects/performers. Roosens (1989) informs us that “for the vindication of the ethnic group, it is sufficient that a social border be drawn between itself and similar groups by means of a few cultural emblems and values that make it different in its own eyes and in the eyes of others” (p. 12). These “few cultural emblems and values” are markers of an ethnic group given significance by the recognition of both members and non-members. Ethnicity is then, both emic and etic; however, perhaps not equally so.

Yet, what happens when members of an ethnic group are physically separated from their original context and situation, such as those Lebanese and their progeny in the diaspora? How do they negotiate and demonstrate their ethnic identity via reference to ethnic markers in a new and often diverse cultural environment? According to Livio Sansone, the key is in understanding globalization.

### ***Globalization and Ethnicity***

Livio Sansone (2003) cites Vermeulen when saying that “globalization enables the worldwide dissemination of symbols that are associated with a number of local identities and individual characteristics” (p. 4). The process of Americanization is a particularly potent example of this argument. Once purely American symbols, the golden arches of McDonald's, as well as the white cursive against red of the Coca-Cola logo are now ubiquitous. However, symbols need not be only visual or even aural. Cultural markers can include the ways in which we relate to others, our eating habits or ideologies. Sansone attributes this phenomenon to what Jan Nederveen Pieterse has termed “global memory”, where pockets of disparate world populations reference similar ethnic discourses which manifest as symbols from “the same symbol bank” (p. 5). Sansone argues that ethnic identity no longer has to correspond to certain areas on the map: “nowadays, black, Muslim, and Indian identities can no longer be perceived independently of globalization” (p. 5). They are no longer location-specific.

Certainly, globalization plays a profound role in democratizing access to the

now worldwide symbol bank. Yet, humans have always moved about for reasons such as trade, displacement from natural disasters or the need to escape religious or ethnic persecution. Cases-in-point: The Silk Routes in use from the first century BCE until approximately 1400, which laced together parts of Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe; the eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano on the island of Montserrat in 1997, which led many to flee to the United Kingdom; and the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain into North Africa by King Phillip III in 1609 are three such examples from history. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century world as a network of nation-states is particularly marked with human uprootedness and transplantation. Citizens become refugees in countries of asylum (or simply emigrate) as a result of failed states and civil wars (e.g. Lebanon, Somalia and Bosnia); multinational corporations send management from the Global North into the Global South (e.g. Shell/Royal Dutch, IBM and Nike); and the ill vestiges of colonialism, neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism, such as political instability and economic stagnation, encourage massive immigration to mostly Western countries (e.g. Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian immigration to France and other European countries; Mexican immigration into the United States; and Jamaican immigration to the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada). That is not to mention more temporary forms of relocation, such as tourism and study abroad.

Still, globalization goes beyond the increased shuffling of human bodies. The transfer of human bodies means the transfer of ethnic symbols that once corresponded most specifically to a concrete location. And although the *debke* will always be tied to Lebanon, it is not necessary to have lived in Lebanon (or even to have visited), in order to claim this ethnic marker that demonstrates membership with the Lebanese ethnicity. This phenomenon is only intensified by the rapid-fire exchange of information on the Worldwide Web, where in an instant the global symbol pool is digitally lain before us. (Claiming certain symbols does not necessarily amount to appropriating the corresponding ethnicity in its entirety, however. Trends in fashion prove this: Aztec designs are currently all the rage for the young and “hip” in the United States. A few seasons prior, Native American moccasins and African tribal prints were *la moda*. Wearing any of these does not amount to a shift in ethnic identity.) Instantly, one can learn how the youth of Beirut dress, or how they make

use of their vernacular. The pace and scale of this global cultural reorganization is what is most notable about globalization: The “fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shifts in the face of a no less dramatic acceleration in the temporal structure of crucial forms of human activity” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012).

Yet, if globalization allows nearly indiscriminate access to ethnic symbols regardless of location, then in theory, populations not traditionally linked with certain emblems *should* be able to claim them in all fairness.<sup>24</sup> Or populations spatially or even temporally separate from an ethnic source may claim its symbols. Such is the case with some diasporic groups, such as the Lebanese-Argentines, in which some members may “reclaim” ethnic emblems after several generations of suppression as a response to assimilation or acculturation. In the case of the Lebanese-Argentines of Buenos Aires (as well as other ethnic groups in other Latin American countries), I posit that miscegenation in greater society could play a heavy role in whether group members opt for ethnic expression. I agree with Sansone's theory that ethnicity is not essential; that it has always been a choice, and one that depends on environment (e.g., where one lives, the history and current state of ethnic/racial relations of the location, the ethnic/racial makeup of the location, etc.).<sup>25</sup>

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24 The process of “claiming” ethnic emblems does not always work out so smoothly, however. Ethnic emblems are tied to the culture and history of a people, and in situations of ethnic or political struggle can prove incendiary, as both sides vie for the right to call these emblems their own. Consider Dr. Saad’s point of “the bitter struggles over Humous and Falafel between Israelis and Palestinians”. Even in less inflamed circumstances, claiming ethnic symbols can lend a sense of pride: e.g., Who was the first to discover “America”? Where is John the Baptist’s head buried? Where are Christopher Columbus’ remains—the Dominican Republic or Spain?

25 I do not argue that the world is necessarily less ethnically diverse for globalization. Consider Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1960s influential study on ethnicity in the United States. Their final published conclusions in *Beyond the Melting Pot: the Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* state that the idea of the “American melting-pot” is a fallacy. Rather, the U.S. of A. is more accurately a smörgåsbord, where differences in ethnicity have sparked greater awareness of “us” and “them”, instead of blurring the lines of demarcation. They explain that ethnicity is commonly employed in choosing a spouse, looking for a job, or deciding where to live (<http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/Ethnicity.html>).

### *Ethnicity as a Non-Essential Identity*

Daniel Bell surmises that more people today choose to claim and express an ethnic identity than in years past, because membership in an ethnic group allegedly provides more stability on a macro level than other identities—especially in this time of authoritative decline (as cited in Roosens, 1989, p. 17). Additionally, according to Roosens, an ethnic identity can provide “psychological security...a feeling of belonging, a certainty that one knows one's origin, that one can live on in the younger generations of one's people who will carry on the struggle...”(p. 16). Barth offers somewhat of a counterargument. He states that a preference to claim ethnic identity waxes and wanes in accordance with the need to defend one's social or economic interests: people make ethnic claims if it is economically advantageous (p. 13). We could qualify Barth's position by stating that a public expression of ethnicity could be predicated on the social and economic climates in which group members find themselves. Less “rational” motives, however, may influence whether this identity is completely expressed, expressed in private or expressed in environments in which there are only other group members. Nostalgia is powerful.

Michael Humphrey (2004) insists that the diaspora always carries a connotation of nostalgia, loss and displacement:

Today the use of diaspora refers to a sense of exile, the feeling of wanting to return home but being unable to because of exclusion by politics or history. One is made an outcast because of present need or fear, or because generational distance makes it impossible to find one's way back home. But diaspora<sup>26</sup> is not merely understood as banishment or being made an outcast from one's home society but from all society.

The word diaspora is loaded. Michael Humphrey (2004) says that “[d]iaspora refers to a form of social relations produced by the displacement from home...the persistence of tradition (identity) despite its displacement from place of origin”. In other words,

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26 A term that was once employed to refer to the dispersion of Jews throughout the world from their “homeland”, diaspora today is generally used for any significantly sized population living away from their place of origin, either temporarily or permanently (Suleiman, 1999, p.127). And that the population living abroad is large indicates an exodus most likely for traumatic reasons, such as civil war, poor economic conditions, or political upheavals.

diaspora is a live entity in flux and in constant communication with its source through visits, letters and remittances sent back to relatives. Political alliances forged abroad with impacts felt at home constitute “social relations”. Diaspora is how those away view and interact with those at the place of origin, and how they hold and maintain the continuum from home to host country.

Vincent Crapanzano (2010) concurs: “Like all immigrants and exiles the diasporic Lebanese are caught in an in-between. They are at once Lebanese and American, Canadian, French, or Australian...They have continually to bargain their identity—or better their identities...Double or multiple identities can be painful, especially in prejudicial situations” (p. xi). This internal identity conflict is not an issue for every immigrant, however. Motives for leaving “home”, how much time has elapsed from the time of departure (or generations have been born), integration in the host country, as well as the social and cultural environment of the host country all matter. Some of the conversations I shared with Argentines evidenced a casual personal attitude about the participants' heritage—whether of Lebanese descent or some other ancestry. I would ask where a person's family is from, and more often than not he or she would reply with an unemotional “Italy, on my father's side”, or “I have Syrian blood on the part of my grandfather”, or “I think I have some English somewhere in there”, or “My mother is Spanish and my father is Argentinean”. In most of these cases, the participants' families have already lived in Argentina for some generations. But Crapanzano and Humphrey's point is well taken. If the bonds to the home country and the pain of departing are still fresh, living in the diaspora can feel a bit like being orphaned: “Where are my roots and do I belong here?”

“Home”, then, can represent authenticity of self and community, the original source of a particular ethnicity, a language, a nation, an approach to the world—and more. Crapanzano (2010) asserts Lebanon “is far more than a place, a space of origin, a country, a village, a family home, a family, it is also, and perhaps foremost for diasporic Lebanese, but for resident Lebanese as well, a space of memory” (p. x). It is also a space of imagination, for what is memory but imagination of the past? Michael Humphrey (2004) makes an excellent point that those in “Lebanese diaspora communities [do not] conceive of the 'imagined present' or 'past' in the same way”. Like feelings of nostalgia, the very mental construction of home depends on a number

of factors, from the period in time of departure, to the current political climate of the homeland, to the extent of relations back home, and the environment of the host country. Within the same diasporic community these ideas of “home” may differ, and these differences dictate how members interact with their place of origin, or whether they do at all. For example, those Lebanese in the diaspora who fled because of the Lebanese civil war of the 1990s have a very different understanding of “home” to those Lebanese who left their country in the 1940s. These perceptions would differ even more drastically from those Lebanese who emigrated at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And such discrepancies do not even begin to touch upon the variations in political, religious, social, economic and regional experiences of many of these immigrants who come from a country that has been referred to as “a state without a nation”. Yet, what is significant here is that there even remains an idea of “home”, although members of a diaspora could be very well settled into their host country or have never even been to Lebanon.

For those living in the diaspora, “home” sometimes evokes longing—even if one has grown up only in the host country and has never been to the place of one's heritage. One participant expressed that although he has never been to Lebanon he really wants to go, but for now, the idea of his “homeland” is hazy. He has nothing tangible with which to construct an understanding of the “land of the cedars” aside from stories and pictures that are not his, but belong instead to older family members in Buenos Aires. He told me that some of his Lebanese relatives have been to the *Capital Federal*, but visits such as those are always difficult because there is the language barrier. He never learned Arabic (his father thought English would be more useful); his relatives from Lebanon do not speak Spanish. In spite of all this, he knows Lebanon is home and that he will get there one day—how ever far away the idea still is.

The construction of an ethnic identity rooted in home as its source is very much tied to the existence of nostalgia, loss and displacement—or their absence. If there is no emotional bond to one's ancestry (or even basic interest), it is even less likely one would choose to align oneself with an ethnicity discourse. So what does it mean that several generations have passed since the first Syro-Lebanese immigrated to Argentina, the Lebanese have culturally assimilated in Buenos Aires and

exogamous marriage is a frequent reality?

Like Livio Sansone, I posit that a person need not identify themselves in ethnic terms—even if ethnicities provide a sense of stability and psychological security. Sansone (2003) says

...many people can live quite happily without such things as ethnicity. There are certain people who do not identify with a single given ethnic identity... [t]hey are mainly found in modern cities, where increasing numbers of inhabitants form part of more than one subculture, thereby creating a multi-layered social identity of which ethnicity is just one of many components (p. 7).

Sansone emphasizes that modern cities are frequently the sites where people are least likely to identify themselves ethnically. Many modern cities also tend to be highly diverse because of globalization (recent and not so recent), where people from all over the world interact in close quarters. In some places, they also often intermarry. Think of Buenos Aires, Sao Paolo, Toronto, New York, London, Johannesburg, Berlin.

According to Harry Hoetink, generally throughout Latin America “inter-ethnic relations and the racialization of social groups” have followed a similar pattern, where that pattern “is characterized by a tradition of widespread intermarriage between people of different phenotypes...” (as cited in Sansone, 2003, p. 8). Given the forty-four immigrant groups the government's cultural organization, *El Observatorio de Colectividades*, specifies to have immigrated to Argentina (from Japanese, to Croatian, Swedish, Cape Verdian, Austrian, Jewish, Bolivian, Korean, Dominican, Armenian and beyond), 97% of the population of Argentina considers itself (or is considered) white, according to the CIA World Factbook. The remaining three percent is either mixed with Amerindian, or belongs to another non-white group. Statistics do vary slightly according to sources, however. The website World Statesmen puts Argentina's ethnic/racial population at 86.4% for whites, 6.5% for mestizos, 3.4% for Amerindians, 3.3% for Arabs, and 0.4% for other groups (World States Men, 2012). A Maimonides University study render results of an even less homogeneous populace. A team of biochemists, biologists, anthropologists and archeologists concluded that Argentina's racial/ethnic makeup is closer to 65% European, 30% Amerindian and 5% African (Argentina Investiga). These three studies point to two possible conclusions: one, Argentina's population has mixed considerably throughout the decades such that



the largest immigrant groups have nearly absorbed the smaller ones; and two, in the absence of very detailed surveys on ethnicity and race, many Argentines self-identify as white—perhaps because many do have Spanish and Italian blood (two of the largest immigrant groups to the country).<sup>27</sup> This phenomenon is undoubtedly related to the assimilationist discourse in Argentina and Latin America just a century before. Sansone (2003) says that “[a]ll over Latin America we not only come across similar patterns in race relations, but also similar official and popular discourses as to color. These discourses tend to praise miscegenation and the creation of a new (Latin) race, rather than ethnic separateness” (p. 8). If we recall our discussion on cultural nationalism in chapter one, the goal of the cultural nationalist intellectual movement was to define the ideal Argentine race and effectively coax the many different immigrant groups into fitting the mold.

In this vein, in the early days of the republic, assimilation encouraged the Syro-Lebanese and other less desired immigrant groups to ideologically self-identify as “Argentine”. “Argentine” most often constituted a Spanish-speaking, Catholic, fair-skinned national. In his 1963 work *El gaucho*, Lebanese-Argentine author Ibrahim Hallar states that “the only immigrant groups who mixed with the natives were Spaniards, Italians and Arabs”. As Civantos (2006) points out, including Arabs with the Spanish and Italians who married and procreated exogamously implies Hallar's Lebanese claims to European-ness at the least, and whiteness at the most (p. 65).

But miscegenation further facilitated this process. Hallar (1963) acknowledges interethnic/interracial mixing in Argentina saying, “We are, save rare exceptions, a mish-mash of Arabo-hispanics, blacks and Indians, in the historical initiation of South and Central America. A new race that should move us to be proud of such a remarkable conglomeration” (p. 46). He also buys into the idea of a new Argentine race. Inhabiting an interethnically/interracially mixed and highly diverse society,

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27 Although these three studies break down the population of Argentina into different categories — white/Amerindian/non-white vs. white/mestizo/Amerindian/Arab/other vs. European/Amerindian/African—the conclusions still hold true. If anything, these criteria strengthen both claims. That, for instance, the Arab category is present in one study and not the other two, could imply that Argentines of some Arab ancestry are choosing to identify with another racial/ethnic category, or that it is more difficult to distinguish among those who have mixed considerably within the Argentine population.

Argentines of Lebanese descent have been freed up to self-identify in other ways than ethnicity. For one reason, as Sansone says, in Latin America highly diverse societies were discouraged from ethnically aggregating. For another reason, exogamous marriages between Argentines of Lebanese ancestry and not of Lebanese ancestry have meant that Lebanese ethnicity is not the only way in which progeny may form an ethnic identity. Another side of this phenomenon is that because many people are mixed, ethnic group boundaries lose some of their importance. It is no longer a matter of full-blooded Syro-Lebanese and full-blooded Italians vying for the same economic and social resources. Demarcating ethnic territory is no longer critical. Additionally, ethnic groups among very mixed populations are more difficult to detect from the outside. Miscegenation makes distinguishing members based on ethnic symbols alone a sticky task; no one set of ethnic markers corresponds to a “group”. And logically, highly mixed societies hardly ever produce enough members to correspond to exact ethnic ratios. It is rare to find a large enough population consisting of the same mix of ethnic proportions to constitute a new ethnic group (although ethnic groups are also determined by the ways in which people identify themselves and people may choose to identify with one ethnicity over another).

And thus, having an ethnic identity is not essential. Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Argentina saw a massive influx of immigrants, whether from Greater Syria, Italy, Poland, Spain, England or France. This hodge-podge of ethnic and racial identities, in conjunction with the country's policy of assimilation and the phenomenon of frequent miscegenation, has today rendered ethnicity quite optional for citizens. Yet, if individuals opt out of aligning with an ethnic discourse, what are other ways in which they may choose to identify themselves?

### ***Race and Nationalism as Alternatives to Ethnic Identity***

Race and nationalism are two very powerful alternatives of self-identification to ethnicity. In *Race, Language and Culture*, Franz Boas (1940) gives a rudimentary definition of race, one which still reflects a commonly accepted understanding of the term in current popular culture. For Boas, a race is “a group of people that have certain bodily and perhaps also mental characteristics in common” (p. 4). Hair texture, skin color, intelligence, and nose shape are such characteristics. According to the

Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the formation of racial groups has historically (and polemically) been based on five criteria: one, that they are founded on biology; two, that this biological foundation creates distinct racial groups wherein all members of each group have the same set of biological characteristics not found in other groups; three, that these biological characteristics are propagated throughout generations; four, that racial groups correspond to certain geographical locations (e.g. Africa, Europe, Asia, North America and South America); and five, that biological foundations essentially show up as both physical phenotypes, such as hair texture, skin color, eye shape, and behavioral phenotypes, such as intelligence. Cornell and Hartmann (1998) delineate race as “a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical characteristics”, where “which characteristics constitute the race—the selection of markers and therefore the construction of the racial category itself—is a choice human beings make” (p. 24).

The validity of race as a concept has been debated in academia and the scientific community ad nauseum. One argument is that we must use new criteria in establishing boundaries between racial groups, so that the original four racial categories of Asian, Native American, African and Caucasian are subdivided to yield more accurate groupings that account for greater physiological variations among humans. This notion, however, does not consider that “the extent of genetic variation among individuals within supposed racial groups typically exceeds the variation between the groups” (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, pp. 22-23). Another argument proposes that after much research on what biologically constitutes race, the genetic differences between groups are so miniscule and inconsistent that they render the concept of race unfounded. Races do not really exist. That it has thus far been impossible to reach a consensus on the number of racial groups in the world is telling. Biological anthropologist Janis Hutchinson says that, “When you begin to understand the biology of human variation, you have to ask yourself if race is a good way to describe that” (RACE: Are We So Different?). Cornell and Hartmann (1998) maintain that “the persistence of the idea of biologically distinct human races owes more to popular culture and pseudoscience than to science, and the idea's pedigree is not scientific but historical” (p. 22). Instead many scholars purport that race is a social construct, whereby humans invent categories in which we place other people based on

certain physical characteristics. We then attach social significance to these invented groups “to the extent that we use them to organize and interpret experience, to form social relations, and to organize individual and collective action” (p. 24). Yet, although many scholars consider race a social construct, they do acknowledge that the notion is a powerful one with real consequences in human lives.

Sansone (2003) says that the processes of racialization (coming to be classified as a race) and ethnicization (the making of an ethnic group) work at times in tandem, or in succession. For example, race is one way to experience ethnicity, where the accent is on physiological traits—meaning, once a race has become an ethnicity, or vice versa. What then, is the relationship between race and ethnicity? Race is a socially constructed category assigned to a group of people, and based on physical traits. Ethnicity is identification rooted in common ancestry, a perceived shared past and recognizable ethnic symbols. Both are dynamic terms that have been constructed in diverse human contexts. Cornell and Hartmann (1998) say that while ethnicity and race cannot be equated, they are not mutually exclusive either. Sometimes they overlap; at other moments they are completely separate. Historically, whereas race has typically been assigned to individuals—and thus the classification is external, ethnicity has tended to be self-asserted (although it can also be assigned as a category) (p. 25). The very ability to designate race is, according to Cornell and Hartmann, “an assertion of the power to define the 'other' and in doing so to create it as a specific object” (p. 28).

Race as a concept is weighty; there is little wonder as to why individuals may choose to identify themselves according to race over ethnicity if it proves advantageous or practical. In the early years of Jewish, Irish and Italian immigration to the United States, all three groups were classified as non-white. Eventually acquiring status as white meant an end to discrimination and an induction into the hegemonic racial group of the U.S. (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, p. 32-33). In her book *Between Arab and White*, Sarah M. A. Gualtieri (2009) discusses the very crucial decision pre-World War II Syrian immigrants to the U.S. had to make in defining themselves ethnically and racially. In the Jim Crow south, falling on the

“wrong” side of the color line could end in being “strange fruit”.<sup>28</sup> Context matters. Even in post-assimilation era, highly diverse and very interracial/interethnically mixed Argentina, context matters. That the three aforementioned studies on race and ethnicity in the Argentine state render quite different results hints that Argentines could be self-identifying according to their environment. Racial and ethnic diversity, existing racial or ethnic hegemony and history of a location qualify self-identification. These are social negotiations, and these negotiations amount to politics of identity. Given the collective circumstances of a place, individuals choose how best to identify themselves according to their values, necessities and ambitions.

Nationalism is yet another compelling option for self-classification. Like race, nationalism shares some commonalities with ethnic identity. Howard Wollman and Philip Spencer (2002) explain in *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* that a multitude of nationalisms exist in the world, but fundamentally are all “an ideology which imagines the community in a particular way (as national), asserts the primacy of this collective identity over others, and seeks political power in its name” (p. 2). In other words, nationalism is a set of ideas about a collective identity which corresponds to a certain group of people (nation), and hovers a level higher than other identities in a quest for power. Cornell and Hartmann (1998) describe it as “the expressed desire of a people to establish and maintain a self-governing political entity” (p. 34). Both definitions explicitly state power as an objective of the unit; in modern days this typically manifests as the state, one half of the term “nation-state”. Yet, what is the nature of the bond that links together a group of people such that they collectively desire to seek self-determination, and in some cases, disregard other identities vis-à-vis nationalism?

Nationalism is a politically charged form of identity. At its crux lie three key themes: autonomy (the power to act independently), unity (cohesion among members within marked boundaries, whether imaginary or geo-political) and identity (distinctiveness). Ethnicity may become nationalist in agenda, and nationalism is often built on real or imagined ethnic ties, but they are not the same (Cornell and

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28 “Strange fruit” was a term given persons who had been hanged to death from a tree.

Hartmann, 1998, p. 37). When an ethnic group becomes nationalist the identity of the collective is rooted in common ancestry, is based on a shared past and is distinguishable by particular ethnic symbols. This identity facilitates unity (and by extension, loyalty). The goal of the ethnic group thereafter, is to obtain the right to self-govern. For instance, the Tibetan Independence movement seeks political separation from People's Republic of China on the assertion that Tibet's unique ethnic identity and culture are being squelched beneath China's autocratic policies. What is more, supporters claim that twice in the past Tibet has been an independent and self-governing nation. In this case, ethnicity has become politicized in the quest for self-determination. In his article entitled "Ethnicity versus nationalism", Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1991) further explains the relationship between ethnic identity and nationalism:

Nationalism stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents, and by implication, it draws boundaries vis-à-vis others, who thereby become outsiders. The distinguishing mark of nationalism is by definition its relationship to the state. A nationalist holds that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries, whereas many ethnic groups do not demand command over a state. When the political leaders of an ethnic movement place demands to this effect, the ethnic movement therefore by definition becomes a nationalist movement. Although nationalisms tend to be ethnic in character, this is not necessarily the case".

By contrast, when nationalism is not constructed from ethnic ties, then a common "history" must be manufactured, along with a unique identity compelling enough to elicit member loyalty to the collective (and most likely, state). This loyalty must supersede other loyalties (e.g. ethnicity, in the case that the nation's borders encompass more than one ethnic group, or race, in the case that racial tension is a concern within the nation's borders). Eriksen concurs with Anthony D. Smith (1986) in that "the multi-ethnic' or 'plural' state is the rule rather than the exception". Yet, Eriksen (1991) adds that cultural plurality can be "reconciled with nationhood and nationalism", or "evaporate historically", leading to the creation of new nation-states, interethnic conflicts or ethnic and state conflicts. It is imperative to remember that nationalism "is not a natural phenomenon, despite the fact that the object of every [brand of] nationalism is to present a particular image of society as natural. Nationalism is ever emergent and must be defended and justified ideologically"

(Eriksen, 1991). The United States of America provides a brilliant case of a persuasive nationalism rooted in a carefully fabricated identity and “history” to manage its cultural plurality. As a country of immigrants, ethnic groups abound and at times racial tension has been rife. Yet, in the American narrative it is precisely these hardships and clashes that make the American nation worthy of preservation at the highest cost. This narrative relates that although United States nationals can be drastically different in ethnic and/or racial background, fundamentally we are all the same. There is a desire for freedom and a willingness to work hard for the chance at a better life that indiscriminately threads together everyone in the “imagined community”. As the story goes, these sentiments are greater than any rifts incited by racial or ethnic differences. Lee Greenwood (1984) sings it best in “God Bless the U.S.A.”:

If tomorrow all the things were gone  
I'd worked for all my life  
and I had to start again  
with just my children and my wife  
  
I'd thank my lucky stars  
to be livin' here today  
'cause the flag still stands for freedom  
and they can't take that away  
  
And I'm proud to be an American  
where at least I know I'm free  
And I won't forget the men who died  
who gave that right to me  
  
And I gladly stand up  
next to you and defend her still today  
'cause there ain't no doubt I love this land  
God bless the U.S.A.

Like race and ethnicity, nationalism is an unnatural construct and a product of diverse social environments on a global scale. For race and ethnic identity to exist they require a contrasting unit, a backdrop against which they can be differentiated. In the case of ethnicity, although self-assertion is essential in the formation of an ethnic group, such a group can only really manifest in the presence of another, distinct ethnic identity. Likewise, race may be a social construct assigned by one group to another

based on physiological dissimilarities, yet the need for contrast remains. Nationalism, nonetheless, is an inherently power-seeking construct in the seemingly zero-sum game of international politics. A contrast then easily becomes an antagonist.

As Eriksen (1991) maintains, nationalism can have both socio-culturally integrating and disintegrating ramifications. At once it is capable of enclosing swathes of people—often of disparate backgrounds; yet also in so doing it creates huge numbers of outsiders. This process of “shutting out” non-members of the nation is often enforced through geographical borders, as well as political and economic policies.

Curiously, it is precisely that nationalism can so effectively unite members within borders while keeping outsiders at bay that proves highly attractive as a form of identification. Provided that the nation (and state if it corresponds to the nation) is fairly stable, claiming nationalism can lend a sense of belonging, protection and security on a grand scale. In the case of diasporic, immigrant and refugee populations, embracing nationalism of the “host” country may mitigate confused feelings of betrayal or fear about the “home” country if reasons for departure included dangerous or unfavorable circumstances, such as civil war, ethnic or religious conflict, or paucity of economic opportunities. In less ethnically diverse countries, transplanted individuals may choose to defer ethnicity to nationalism in order to show loyalty to their new “home”. Or if high levels of interracial/interethnic mixing have occurred within a nation, choosing an ethnic identity may be difficult. Rather, nationalism may become a default category.

Although cultural nationalists spoke in terms of an Argentine “race”, the driving concept of the intellectual movement was more or less the creation of a homogeneous populace who placed allegiance to nation above allegiance to any deviant ethnic background. This speaks to the idea of an ethnic nationalism manufactured from a fabricated history and ethnicity. I asked Jose Sahyoun whether he felt distinctly Lebanese; he told me he felt Lebanese *and* wholly Argentine.<sup>29</sup> There

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<sup>29</sup>Although I did not delve more into this subject, what constitutes being Argentine today? Sahyoun did say that “everyone is welcome in Argentina; it’s a friendly country”. But does the fair-skinned Argentine archetype still prevail? If so, could it be that Lebanese-ness is now equated with being



was no conflict between the two. He continued that Argentina is a country whose doors are open for everyone, and everyone gets along. An Argentine is an Argentine.

But is this a case of one's simultaneously embracing one's ethnicity and Argentine nationalism? Or do such sentiments spring from a cultural nationalist understanding of ethnic nationalism, that the people of Argentina are one Latin race where imaginary ethnic boundaries have been blurred—even erased? In the instance of Sahyoun, I would venture to guess he embraces both his Lebanese roots and the nationalism of Argentina. During our conversation he spoke of the Lebanese as a bounded group in Buenos Aires, with its own distinct history and customs. He asserted that he is a member of that bounded group; yet, likewise, is also Argentine. However, for those Lebanese (and other Argentines) who opt out of self-identification with any ethnic group, I hypothesize that cultural nationalist understanding of ethnic nationalism is a plausible option. Because in this theory “ethnicity” has been expanded to squarely superimpose nationalism which corresponds to Argentine state/political borders, there is no difference between the two. Ethnicity and nationalism are then woven into one, more complicated narrative.

It is worth stating that ethnicity, race and nationalism are not mutually exclusive: An individual may claim one, two or all three identities simultaneously or in succession. However, political, historical, economic, ethnic, and racial contexts do matter. It also matters with whom people are interacting, where and for what purpose. And yet, there is no set formula for how individuals negotiate their identities, save to say according to whichever expression meets their needs at any given time. In other words, identity politics.<sup>30</sup>

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“Argentine”?

<sup>30</sup> I am *not* suggesting that people are calculating through and through. Emotions such as pride, nostalgia, love, admiration, disgust, and betrayal play as much of a role in how people choose to define themselves, as the potential benefits to be garnered from identity choices. On the contrary, I am offering that one of the ways in which we all navigate this world teeming with the unknown, the foreign, and the unsavory is through predicting how we might be affected by them and acting accordingly.

### *Conclusions on Ethnicity*

Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (2009) summarize ethnicity best in *Ethnicity, Inc.*

Ethnic identity is

neither a monolithic ‘thing’ nor, in and of itself, an analytic construct... ‘it’ is best understood as a loose, labile repertoire of signs by means of which relations are constructed and communicated; through which a collective consciousness of cultural likeness is rendered sensible; with reference to which shared sentiment is made substantial. Its visible content is always the product of specific historical conditions which, in variable measure, impinge themselves on human perception and, in so doing, frame the motivation, meaning and materiality of social practice... Cultural identity appears ever more as two antithetical things at once: on the one hand, as a precipitate of inalienable natural essence, of genetics and biology, and, on the other, as a function of voluntary self-fashioning... It is, in other words, *both* ascriptive and instrumental. *Both* innate and constructed. *Both* blood and choice.

(pp. 38, 40)

Everything that Comaroff and Comaroff describe is optional to claim. As Roosens (1989) states, “In certain types of society, individuals may, for their entire lives or for very long periods, assign only limited value to, or may ignore altogether, what would theoretically be their ethnic allegiance, and their social environment can support them in this” (p. 16). Ethnicity then, is like a garment. The question then becomes, in the case of later generations of Lebanese-Argentines desiring to express their Lebanese ethnic identity, how do they do so after assimilation, miscegenation and the passage of time?

## Chapter Three: What is Simulation?

Chapter three is brief, and lays the theoretical framework for the discussion of how the Lebanese-Argentines of Buenos Aires construct a Lebanese ethnic identity. I hypothesize that Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity is a simulation (dynamic *simulacrum*) of the ethnic identity of Lebanon. I look at three post-modern interpretations of *simulacrum*: first, Klossowski's notion of "phantasm"; second, Deleuze's take on the Platonic "idea"; and third, Jean Baudrillard's three orders of simulation, beginning with *simulacrum* and ending with simulation. I primarily look to Deleuze and Baudrillard's theories in examining the construction of ethnicity among the Lebanese-Argentines of Buenos Aires; Klossowski's interpretation of *simulacrum* provides a springboard from which to start.

According to one's understanding of what it means to be of Lebanese descent, one references and performs ethnic symbols associated with Lebanon. Such symbols could be the Arabic language (strategically utilized to emphasize ethnicity or solely as a means of communication),<sup>31</sup> Lebanese cuisine, Lebanese music, references to Phoenicia, cultural elements of the Maronite, Druze or Islamic faiths, Lebanese cultural arts, following or participating in the politics of Lebanon or displaying actual symbols, such as the Lebanese flag. In essence, Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity is a dynamic reflection of the collection of ethnic emblems of Lebanon. It is a living mirrored image that assumes its own authenticity through its connection to its source, and subsequently creates a cultural continuum, an imagined para-national Lebanese ethnic community.

*Simulacrum* is "an image, likeness, or reproduction", a term dating back to Plato's *Republic*, in which he considers art as mimesis<sup>32</sup> (Taylor and Winqvist, 2002, p. 367). In his work entitled *Sophist*, Plato (360 BCE) introduces us to the notion that a copy of an original may manifest in one of two ways: either as an honest attempt at

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31 An email I received from J.U.C.A.L. Argentina began with "Kifak, Kifik...!"; what followed was in Spanish. Likewise, the first message on the Islamic Cultural Center's answering machine is in Arabic; the second is in Spanish.

32 Mimesis is "the art of imitation" (Taylor and Winqvist 249). See Matthew Potolsky's *Mimesis* for a more in-depth exploration of the concept.

representing the object of imitation (*eikastic*), or as a perverse reproduction fashioned to simulate the original from a certain vantage point, thus appearing “real” on some level (*phantastic*). Coke bottles are an example of *eikastic* images, where every bottle is an exact replica of the one that came before. By contrast, *phantastic* images “distort their physical form, diverging from the exact details of the original to correct for the limitations of vision”. The statues in Greek temples proportioned to account for the viewer's eye level are such an example (Potolsky, 2006, p. 151). Because of their colossal size, the statues' upper sections are enlarged to give the appearance of proportion. It is these *phantastic* images which Plato finds suspect. In a *Critical Terms for Art History* article titled "Simulacrum", similarly Michael Camille says, “The simulacrum is more than just a useless image, it is a deviation and perversion of imitation itself—a false likeness” (as cited in Sandoz, 2003). The *simulacrum* is troubling because—unlike the honest *eikastic*—it presents illusion as truth. When seen in its entirety at eye level, an enormous statue in a Greek temple is grossly disproportioned. For Plato, the *phantastic* image shuns the natural rank of original and copy. It does not respect the secondary place of derivative, whose value is only determined by its connection to a source. Instead, because it inspires similar emotional experiences without possessing the form of the original, it potentially rivals the model in value.

French essayist, thinker and artist Pierre Klossowski utilizes Plato's theoretical foundation of *simulacrum*, but bases his interpretation on the notion of *phantasm*. All humans are uniquely characterized by “internal 'impulses'” of ever changing intensities (from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows). Together these result in an image Klossowski terms *phantasm*. More precisely, *phantasm* is “an obsessional image produced instinctively from the life of the impulses, which is in itself incommunicable and nonrepresentable” (Taylor and Winqvist, 2002, p. 367). *Phantasm* hints at the existence of a unique formulation and pulsation of energy in all human beings, one that cannot quite be wholly qualified. For Klossowski then, a simulacrum of the phantasm is “a willed reproduction of a phantasm (in literary, pictorial or plastic form) that simulates this invisible agitation of the soul” (p. 367). Yet, actualization of the *simulacrum* of the phantasm is betrayal, a perversion—as its very “incommunicable and nonrepresentable” essence has just been communicated

and represented by a falsified reproduction.

Philosopher Gilles Deleuze builds on Klossowski's understanding of *simulacrum* as the copy of an original; yet, argues that, like Plato, a reproduction of an *idea* can be either a true copy or a false *simulacrum*. Copies are legitimate representations of an idea for their internal resemblance to it in size, proportion and color; they are an honest attempt at an accurate impression of the model. For example, counterfeit designer handbags are (ironically) honest efforts to replicate a demanded model on the market. As Potolsky (2006) says in *Mimesis*, they “want to be confused with the original, for their value derives from precisely this confusion” (p. 152). *Simulacra*, however, achieve duplicated effects through “ruse” and “trickery”. Aspects are adjusted according to the perspective of the viewer. The above example recounts where upper parts of Greek statues are augmented and lower parts are scaled down to appear more in proportion to the viewer from eye level.

However, counter to Plato's suspicions of *simulacrum* for its deceptive constitution, as well as his insistence that it has no value beyond that which is granted by its association with the original, Deleuze posits that *simulacrum* is not the anti-copy, nor a distorted icon. Instead, it is “an image that has broken free from any single original. It appeals to the contingent and historically grounded condition of the viewer, not to an abstract and purely rational conception of truth” (Potolsky, 2006, p. 151). The *simulacrum* is powerful: from certain angles it appears identical to the original, yet is not. This is significant in that the viewer's perspective becomes the focal point in the interaction, rather than the object itself. A skillful representation, the *simulacrum* has the power to inspire the same emotional experience a viewer has with the original idea. So long as the reaction is identical, the *simulacrum* could theoretically be anything at all. A two-dimensional murder scene in a film has the power to evoke sensations of fear, anxiety and terror; audience members may feel as though a homicide were really taking place before their eyes. The ruse is evident, yet the physical and emotional reactions are quite real.

Deleuze insists that *simulacra* have autonomy of their own, because they are fundamentally distinct creations. Thus, they should “rise and affirm their rights among icons and copies” (Potolsky, 2006, p. 152). And Camille concurs: “The simulacrum is not a degraded copy. It harbors a positive power which denies the original and the

copy, the model and the reproduction... There is no longer any privileged point of view except that of the object common to all points of view” (as cited in Sandoz, 2003).

Jean Baudrillard (1994) entertains the dichotomies of “original” and “copy” from a postmodernist posture. Perversion and purity are inconsequential. Ultimately, he collapses the notion of original and copy, insisting that in today's world there exists no distinction between the real and its duplicates: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real” (p. 2). Baudrillard offers as explanation three orders of simulation: *counterfeit*, *production* and *simulation*. We currently live in the final order of simulation—the order of feigning possession of what one does not really have. It is the order where simulation blurs the lines between “true' and 'false', between 'real' and 'imaginary’” (p. 5).

*Counterfeit* is the period in which simulacra reference an original, such that a copy is a reproduction of a model. A replica of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* is an appropriate example. *Production* entails the mechanization processes of the Industrial Revolution, whereby simulacra of the same value—such as clocks—are produced on the assembly line. *Simulation* is the third order in the postmodern era (which could extend to the present, although the postmodern period ends in the 1990s). It is a period of mass media and information in which simulations are realer than real and have no original reference, nor need for one. Simulations mimic not just objects, but situations, experiences and interactions. The contemporary world of “cybernetization”, where a “cybernetic model of simulation” has supplanted the “(Marxist) model of production”, is such that reality and simulation become indistinguishable, and the latter actually becomes “hyperreal” (Taylor and Winqvist, 2002, p. 368). Effectively, Baudrillard is referencing not only the recreation of the real world on the Worldwide Web in cyberspace, but also all the other many automated and simulated interactions that pervade “real” space. On the internet we have online identities, belong to online communities, conduct business online and carry out conversations with other cyber identities. In real life we have fire drills and flight simulators (Sandoz, 2003). Automatic teller machines, Coke machines and drone missiles are also examples of common cybernetic models of simulation interwoven in today's world. These machines have been programmed to simulate one half of an

interaction between two human beings, an interaction that can produce very human results. In a simulation all of the components are present save what was once reality: a fire, being in the air, receiving money or a Coke from a human, or engaging in hand to hand combat with another soldier. But now simulations are just as “real” for the similar emotional and physical experiences they produce.

Baudrillard looks at simulation with an alarm that mirrors Plato's wariness of *simulacra*. He rationalizes that effective simulations threaten, and in some instances supplant reality. Simulation is the “process through which reality is usurped”. (Sandoz, 2003). Like the distorted reproduction of the original which appeals to the viewer's position by ensuring a particular experience from his or her vantage point, simulation gives the subject all of the sensation of a real encounter without the “real” encounter. But what constitutes “real”? For Baudrillard, simulation is actually “realer than real”, because it has erased the memory of what it once referenced and replaced. It no longer relies on the original, and thus, has the power to reduce “reality” to a system of signs devoid of meaning. (Imagine existing only in cyberspace, where every daily interaction which is normally carried out face-to-face has been reduced to an essentially two-dimensional world of signs.)

Simulation is total mediation without meaning. That is to say, we live in a hyperreal world where everything is mediated, where a medium is understood as a window onto a vision or experience (Sandoz, 2003). Whereas, in the first order of the *counterfeit*, the *simulacrum* existed as a medium to transmit a mimicked experience to the viewer from his or her perspective, the pervading simulations of today consist of all the signage of an original, yet transmit no truth. They exist to exist. And yet, these media are not confined to their own spaces, they are interlaced in our daily experience, such that we cannot distinguish between “real” and “simulated”. According to Baudrillard (1983), in our world today what is mediated is simulated, and that which is simulated is also mediated. The consequences are grave:

When the real is no longer what is used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us—a

strategy of the real, neo-real and hyperreal whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence. (pp.12-13)

Baudrillard's quote is reminiscent of Humphrey and Crapanzano's words on nostalgia in the Lebanese diaspora. They posit the diaspora always has connotations of exile and loss, and Lebanon has come to represent a “space of memory”, a way of life and being. Chapter two establishes that assuming a Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity is not essential for every person of Lebanese ancestry in Buenos Aires—race and/or nationalism may suffice. Yet, for those who do claim the ethnicity, nostalgia can be a powerful factor. Without the severity of Baudrillard's argument on nostalgia, Lebanon does come to represent the “real”, the “true”, the “lived experience”. It is the origin of all emblems potentially construed as ethnically Lebanese. Spatial and temporal separation in the diaspora then incite “production of the real and the referential”, a piece-meal construction of Lebanese ethnic symbols according to one's understanding of what it means to be Lebanese. This construction is precisely a simulation of Lebanese ethnic identity. It is a “re-living the situation 'in their shoes'<sup>33</sup> or from their point of view”, because “[u]nderstanding others is achieved when we ourselves deliberate as they did” (Topor, 2002; Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, 351).

Essentially, my understanding of simulation as it applies to the Lebanese-Argentines of Buenos Aires is a marriage of points from both Deleuze and Baudrillard's theories. I argue that those who choose to claim and express a Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity in Buenos Aires create a *simulacrum* of ethnicity in Lebanon. Ethnicity is signified by identifiable ethnic markers performed by dynamic beings; the *simulacrum* of this must be dynamic, too—hence, use of the notion of simulation. However, I reject Baudrillard's fear that simulation supplants the truth and signifies the death of meaning. Instead I align with Deleuze's argument that the original can

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<sup>33</sup> This is an interesting phrase on which to deliberate, because the diaspora can have a way of making members of populations feel disconnected from “home”, so that “their shoes” could be more apt of a phrase than “our shoes”. The generations that have lived and been born abroad may feel a strong connection for Lebanon; however, there is always a nagging feeling that there is some difference between themselves and those back home. Perhaps it is the way they pronounce Arabic, or which hymns they sing at church, how they prepare a traditional dish or dance the *debke*. This is profound, because it is precisely these ways in which they are connected to home, it is the claiming of these emblems that signifies an allegiance with this ethnic discourse.



still exist, and that simulation may serve as a gateway to new truths and understandings. To replace the original suggests that simulated ethnicities in the diaspora negate the existence of the ethnicity in the home country. It also implies that an imitation is devoid of meaning or truth, that it lacks authenticity. In the case of ethnic identity, when one aligns oneself with an ethnic group, expresses the appropriate ethnic markers and is recognized by non-group members as belonging to the intended ethnicity, authenticity is established. Time and distance become irrelevant.

## Chapter Four: How is Lebanese-Argentine Ethnicity a Simulation of Lebanese Ethnic Identity?

Chapters two and three lay the theoretical framework to discuss how I hypothesize Lebanese-Argentines in Buenos Aires construct their ethnic identity. There are two components of this construction: the simulated and the simulation. The first part of chapter four gives a picture of Lebanon (the simulated), by offering a brief historical, political, religious and cultural snapshot of the country. It is important to note that part one is in no way a definitive interpretation of Lebanon's history, culture and politics, for as the saying goes, "There are three sides to every story: yours, mine and the truth". As there exist numerous (differing) narratives on Lebanon's past (and present, for that matter) it is necessary to start somewhere. Therefore, part one merely offers a basic context from which to situate part two of chapter four (the simulation), which details my ethnographic experience in the Argentine capital studying the Lebanese-Argentine population. With this point established, everything in, of or from Lebanon is a potential ethnic emblem which members of the Lebanese diaspora may reference in their expressions of Lebanese-ness.

And this conversation is particularly salient, because it addresses how members of a population may achieve (relevant) ethnic continuity despite spatial and temporal separation from its source. Examining the Lebanese-Argentines of Buenos Aires provides a case study of a group which has undergone increasingly common circumstances germane to globalization: assimilation (or its less severe cousin, acculturation), miscegenation and the inevitable forward-ticking of time.

### Part I: Lebanon as "Home", the Simulated

#### *History and Geography Infused with Politics*

The present-day state of Lebanon is a minuscule parcel of land smaller than the United States state of Connecticut; it covers only 4,036 square miles. To the west of Lebanon lies the Mediterranean Sea. To the north and east is Syria, and Israel is to the south. The terrain varies from coastal plain, to the fertile Bekaa valley, to the arable

Lebanon and snow-capped Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges. The Litani is Lebanon's most important river, running a length of approximately ninety miles from south of Baalbek to slightly north of Tyre, and supplying much of the country's water.

Beirut is the capital of Lebanon, and the city which the New York Times placed atop its list of "44 Places to Go in 2009" (New York Times). It is a major sea port resting at the foot of the Lebanon Mountains, with approximately 1.57 million people inhabiting the capital, and another 2.1 million living in surrounding areas. Once dubbed the "Paris of the Middle East" where many inhabitants do speak French in addition to Arabic, Beirut is first mentioned in the Amarna Letters from the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Today, it is a place of happening nightlife, international festivals (e.g. Beirut International Film Festival, Beirut International Jazz Festival), museums (e.g. Sursock Museum, National Museum of Beirut), universities (e.g. American University in Beirut, Lebanese University), cafes, markets, restaurants, natural spaces and cultural diversity.

Yet, Beirut has also been called "the city that would not die", for its colorful and tumultuous past (a name it shares with London, Manchester, Bradgate, Iowa, U.S.A. and surely other towns and cities worldwide). Its history is as multilayered as the compounded vestiges of Phoenician, Roman, Mamluk, Crusader, Abbassid, Umayyad, Byzantine, Persian, Canaanite and Ottoman civilizations unearthed in the capital's downtown area. But in recent times, Beirut has been marred with civil war, internal fighting often among religious groups that has prompted the exodus of nearly one million Lebanese. The Lebanese Civil War lasted from 1975 until 1990, concluding with the Taif Agreement of 1989. The Hundred Days' War of 1978 and the 1982 Lebanon War erupted amidst the on-going fighting. During the 2006 Lebanon War between Hizbollah and the Israeli military, Israeli warplanes bombed south Beirut.

Aside from Beirut are other relevant and less contentious Lebanese cities, such as Tripoli (the country's second major city and also an important sea port), Tyre (capital of the ancient Phoenician empire), Sidon (which contains Phoenician burial sites and was the site of one of Jesus Christ's sermons) and Jbayl (ancient Biblos, and perhaps the oldest town in the world, as well as the site of the first Crusader castle).

Modern-day Lebanon (and the Levant) can be traced back to the ancient

civilization of Phoenicia—perhaps “the first known commercial empire on earth” (Sheehan and Latif, 2008, p. 20). Tyre was the capital of the empire, which reached as far west as the Strait of Gibraltar and included the famed city of Carthage. The Phoenicians traded metal, linen, wood, glass, precious stones, and ivory with communities from what are today Jordan and Syria. They also invented the first known alphabet, on which the Arabic, Latin and Hebrew alphabets would later be based. In 64 BCE Phoenicia fell to the Romans under Pompey the Great, and became the major supplier of timber for the ships and buildings the Romans constructed throughout their empire. In A.D. 630, what is Lebanon today came under the Umayyad caliphate at the helm of the expanding Muslim empire. The Abbasids supplanted the Umayyads in A.D. 750, and the Abbasid caliphate caved to the Mamluks in A.D. 1250.

Under Muslim rule Christians were still allowed to practice their faith, and Mount Lebanon became a safe haven for persecuted religious minorities. It is here the Maronite community settled in the seventh century, and the Druze in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In 1099, a band of Christian French, German and English soldiers known as the Crusaders arrived to the Levant with the aim of propagating Christian influence in the Muslim-dominated eastern Mediterranean; they remained there until the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Two centuries later the Ottomans overthrew the Mamluks.

Under Ottoman rule Lebanon was divided into *vilayets*, over which powerful local families were put in charge. These families became dynasties, which later aligned with Muslim and Christian groups—most notably the Druze and Maronites. Switching allegiances over time led to political instability, and these districts became hotbeds of bloody conflict of a seemingly religious nature. Riding beneath the facade of religious difference, however, was an undercurrent of outrage over economic disparities between the groups. In 1858, civil war broke out in Lebanon; it was during this time many (Syro-) Lebanese also immigrated from Greater Syria (see chapter one for an explanation of the migration of Syro-Lebanese from Greater Syria in greater detail). Ottoman and European troops established a new government in 1859 which ensured a Christian ruler. This arrangement lasted until the end of the First World War when the Ottoman Empire also fell.

The newly established League of Nations in 1919 partitioned Greater Syria

into Palestine for the British, and a separate Lebanon and Syria for the French. After much struggle with the French, what would become Lebanon finally gained its independence on November 22, 1943. The country drafted the National Pact, which “was designed to ensure that Lebanese independence would be complete, with Christians promising to cut connections to Christian Europe, and the Muslim groups promising not to seek ties to the Arab world” (Sorenson, 2010, p. 13). It also “sanctified the confessional system of the 1926 Constitution, distributing power on the basis of the 1932 census with its six-to-five ratio of Christians to Muslims” (p. 13). Lebanon is richly religiously diverse; there are Maronites, Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Druze, Melkites, Greek Orthodox, and Catholics, among other groups. Such diversity coupled with political and economic disparities, confined within tiny borders has often spelled out serious turmoil.

The current political regime termed a “confessional system” is confounding; political power is apportioned according to religious presence in the country (Sorenson, 2010, p. 69). Demographically Lebanon is without one clear majority (no census has been conducted in Lebanon since 1932), thus feasibility of such an arrangement is dubious at best, disastrous at worst.

In addition to political troubles, Lebanon has had a history of economic turmoil. In recent decades the country has suffered tremendously from civil war and recessions, requiring international assistance to recover.

### ***Major Religious Groups***

Islam and Christianity are the two major religions in Lebanon; various divisions comprise both religious groups. The Maronite, Eastern Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches, as well as the Assyrian Church of the East are the dominant Christian confessions. Islam is split between the Sunni and Shiite denominations, and there are also some adherents to the Druze faith in Lebanon.

As Maronites were the largest religious group to immigrate from Greater Syria to Argentina, a brief look at the Maronite faith in Lebanon is helpful when considering the religious factors which act on Lebanese ethnicity and culture. Christians are thought to make up roughly forty percent of Lebanon's religious population, and Maronites are the largest group of this religious belief system.

The origins of the name “Maronite” are not definitive. In his work *Tarikh al-Ta'ifa al-Maruniyya*, Patriarch Istefan al-Duwayhi purports that the Maronites took their name from a monastery in Syria named *Marun* for Christ. Jabra'il Ibn al-Qila'i suggests the Maronites derived their name from “the pious Marun,” the “Patriarch of Great Antioch” (Moosa, 1986, p. 12). The first Maronites lived in the valley of the Orontes, as well as inhabited other northern parts of Syria, including parts of Mount Lebanon. By the end of the eleventh century they had settled on Mount Lebanon as their home where they established themselves as agriculturalists (Fawaz, 1994, p. 11). A visit to “The Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon” website reveals that Maronites are one of six major traditions of the Catholic Church (Alexandrian, Antiochene, Armenian, Chaldean, Constantinopolitan (Byzantine), and Latin (Roman)). Catholic Christians are Uniates or followers of the Roman Catholic Church. However, there is some dispute as to whether Maronites have always aligned with the Holy See. Matti Moosa says, “[b]y faith, liturgy, rite, religious books, and heritage, the Maronites were of Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) origin until the very end of the sixteenth century when they became ultramontane followers of the Roman Catholic Church” (Moosa, 1986, p. 1).

In A.D. 451, Emperor Marcian convened the Council of Chalcedon with the approval of Pope Leo the Great. This council established the 'Chalcedonian Definition,' which defined the nature of Christ as dual: one in person, one in hypostasis. The East-West Schism (also The Great Schism) of A.D. 1054, then formally divided the church of the Roman Empire into the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church on grounds of theological discrepancies and ecclesiastical differences. The Eastern Orthodox Church adhered to the Chalcedon Definition. Some research suggests the early Maronite church was a part of the early Eastern Orthodox Churches, which Rome cast aside as being schismatic. The Maronite faith may have evolved from Monothelism, which instructs that Jesus Christ had one will and two natures (as opposed to dyothelism, which specifies that Jesus had both divine and human will, as well as two natures). According to Leila Fawaz, “...it is commonly believed by other Christians and by Muslims that the Maronite church was established as Syrian Monothelete in 680, and that it abandoned Monothelism in the twelfth century, when it recognized papal supremacy without

giving up its own Syriac liturgy and priesthood” (Fawaz, 1994, p. 11).

Eventually the Roman Catholic Church—in conjunction with the French some time after—would provide the structure needed for Maronites to become a cohesive community in Lebanon. Maronite clergy would then help steer the community in the direction of an “ethnic mold” with Lebanon as the homeland. And it was “[t]he connection to the Latin Church directly, and the French indirectly, [that] gave Maronites the notion that they are a people apart (or “chosen”) from those in the immediate environment” (Hagopian, 1989, p. 108). According to this belief, the mission of the Maronite is to introduce progress to those of the Arab East. And it is precisely because “Maronites insist they have a commitment to universalism (respect for all while keeping their own identity and values)” that they are equipped to carry out such a mission (p. 108). The ultimate goal is to shed “enlightenment and openness that they have gained by bridging the Western and Eastern worlds” (p. 108).

### ***Music, Literature, Gastronomy and the Debke***

On November 19, 2010, Lebanese-British singer Mika performed at the Hot Festival in Buenos Aires. He is famous for such songs as “Love Today” and “Grace Kelly”. On some sites announcing his impending concert, users expressed unrestrained glee: “OMG OMG OMG OMG” (“Oh My God Oh My God Oh My God Oh My God Oh My God”). “Ahhhhhhh! Me muero, me muero, me muero! (“Ahhhhhhh! I’m dying, I’m dying, I’m dying!”). Another user even said it was the happiest day of his/her life.

Mika (born Michael Holbrook Penniman, Jr.) is one of millions in the Lebanese diaspora, the progeny of a Lebanese mother and American father. He was born in 1983 in Beirut, but left with his family at about one year-old because of the Lebanese Civil War. Lebanon has a lengthy record of exodus; by some accounts, there are 14 million Lebanese in the diaspora (The National). The well-loved singer Fairouz, however, is one notable exception: Although she often performed abroad during the Lebanese Civil War, she continued living in her homeland, and refused to side with any of the factions (National Public Radio). Fairouz (born Nihad Haddad) is one of Lebanon’s most famous singers, and has also acquired an impressive international following. National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States named her

one of its “50 Great Voices”, saying that “[p]art of Fairuz's appeal was her music's accessible themes, such as village life in the mountains of Lebanon — songs about nightingales, drunken neighbors, the smell of jasmine, fig trees and vineyards and a bus ride from the village of Himalaya to Tanourin” (National Public Radio). In a country with a rocky history, music has oft-served as a balm to soothe weariness: Fairouz’s “Behebak Ya Libnan” (“I love you, Lebanon”) was musical solace during the Lebanese Civil War, as was “Ana Mosh Kaafer” (“I’m not a Heathen”) by Ziad Rahbani. “Faris Odeh” by Rim Banna, “Hareb” by Kazem el Saher and “Quds al Atika” (“Old Jerusalem”) by Fairouz are other popular songs by Lebanese artists, which speak to tragedies in the Middle East. Other popular musicians of Lebanon—contemporary and of yore—include Philimoun Wahbi, Nancy Ajram, Tawfeeq Albasha, Haifa Wehbe, the Rahbani Brothers, Myriam Fares, Najah Salaam, Ziad Rahbani, Sabah, Nasri Shamsiddeen, Zeki Naseef, Sister Marie Keyrouz, Julia Boutros, Marcel Khalife and Wadii Alsafi.

Yet, as fundamental to Lebanese culture and tradition as music is the *debke*, Lebanon’s national dance, and one it shares with neighbors Syria, Israel/Palestine, Jordan and Iraq. It is most popular in the mountainous regions of these countries. As the story goes, the *debke*'s origins are in the *aouna*, the tradition in which villagers would gather in an arc to help new homeowners tamp their mud roof by stamping on it. Eventually, music was added to the process to entertain the participants and incite them to liveliness in the cold. Today, the *debke* manifests in manifold rhythms, steps, tunes and melodies, and is a staple dance at weddings, festivals and other celebrations.

And just as Lebanon's national dance has criss-crossed the globe in the Lebanese diaspora, so too has its cuisine. In general, food is a hugely important angle through which to explore an ethnicity, because of its subtle commentary on the people who created it, their environment and history. Gastronomy reveals the geography of a people (climate and landscape), available resources (beasts of burden or smaller animals, plentiful water or lack thereof, arable land coupled with the skills to cultivate it), history (traditions of fine wine-making, etc.) as well as belief systems and values (the requirement of kosher or halal foods, the sanctity of certain animals, such as cattle, the forbiddance of wine, particular foods included in religious or secular ceremonies and celebrations, etc.).



In light of these considerations, Lebanese cuisine is more than telling: It is a savory blend of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern kitchens. *Kibbeh* (minced lamb, bulgur wheat, pine nuts and minced onions), chicken with rice, fish with *tahina* and grilled lamb or chicken skewers are typical main dishes. *Mezzes* normally precede the main course, and can be *hummus* (ground chick peas with olive oil and spices), *baba ghanouj* (puréed aubergine), *tabbouleh* (a salad with parsley, minced vegetables and cracked wheat), *dolma* (stuffed vine leaves), *fatayer* (ground meat or spinach stuffed and cooked in triangular dough) and *lebneh* (a yogurt- garlic dip). The *mezzes* usually come with warm pita bread, olive oil and fresh herbs. Finally, the meal may be rounded off with a succulent dessert, and if the occasion requires—wine. *Baklava* is a popular traditional dessert, a sweet pastry made of phyllo dough, honey and crushed pistachios. Most traditional desserts contain dried fruits, jam, honey, molasses or syrup and/or nuts. As the area that is now called Lebanon has produced wine for more than 4,000 years, the drink is frequently included in Lebanese meals. Coming mainly from the Bekaa Valley, three prominent wines in Lebanon are Châteaux Ksara, Kefraya, and Musar. Yet, curiously, the national drink is *arak*, an anise-flavored liquor (Lebanon Embassy United States).

Gibran Khalil Gibran is arguably Lebanon's most widely-known contemporary literary figure. Author of *The Prophet*, Gibran was an artist, novelist, mystical poet and philosophical essayist. In 1883, he was born to a Maronite family in the northern area of Bsharri in Lebanon. As his family was poor and his father consistently plagued with debt, Gibran received no early formal education. Instead, a local village priest taught him the Bible and religion, Syriac, Arabic, history and science. Around the age of twelve, Khalil, his mother and three siblings immigrated to the state of New York in the United States. Three years later he returned to Lebanon in order to study Arabic and French at College La Sagesse in Beirut. In 1904, he published his first set of poems to be known as "A Tear and a Smile", and after a few years relocated to Paris for artistic training. Eventually, Gibran settled in New York, and established a literary society named *al Rabitat al Qalamiya* (The Pen-bond Society), in conjunction with other Lebanese and Arab writers and poets in the United States. *The Prophet* was published in 1923, and eight years later Gibran died in a New York hospital. Although he may be the most recognized of contemporary Lebanese

authors, others such as Amin Maalouf, Hanan al Shaykh, Elias Khoury, Mikhail Naimy, Grace Halabi and Karim el Koussa are notable names in literature.

Examining the music, literature and gastronomy of Lebanon is paramount when discussing the construction of Lebanese ethnicity in Buenos Aires and the diaspora, because these ethnic emblems are powerful, yet easily accessible and duplicable references. Lebanese history and culture are embedded in each, irrespective of time and distance (and even if they exist only in collective memory or imagination). In other words, they are what they are precisely because they originated in Lebanon, and although time passes, Fairouz will always be Fairouz, and Gibran, Gibran. For an ethnic group that has dispersed to every corner of the globe, and for which every subsequent generation may speak a little less Arabic (or none at all) and visit Lebanon a little less often (or not at all), it is simple to pick up a cook book of Lebanese cuisine, or dedicate oneself to studying the works of Amin al Rihani.

## **Part II: Buenos Aires as Home, the Simulation**

### ***Lebanese-Argentine Ethnicity in Buenos Aires***

Enter 2011: Estela Valverde says that Argentina is no longer a popular destination for Lebanese emigrants; the last immigration wave occurred in the 1980s due to the Lebanese civil war (Valverde, 1992, p. 314; Civantos, 2006, p. 7). Instead, only poorer laborers from surrounding Latin American countries cross into Argentina, such as from Bolivia, Peru or Uruguay. Today the Lebanese-Argentine population is sprawled across Buenos Aires' 48 districts in 15 communes. This is a far cry from *Calle Reconquista*, around which most Syro-Lebanese immigrants clustered in the early waves of migration. Today Reconquista Street is a bustling, hip strip of brick traversing through the wealthy neighborhoods of *Retiro* and *San Nicolás*, with perfume shops, *Pura Vida*, the popular fresh juice and wheatgrass bar, fashionable ladies' boutiques, as well as intriguing restaurants and bars with plenty of outdoor tables. Reconquista is also at the heart of the city's financial district.

The CIA World Factbook estimates Argentina's population to be 42,192,494 as of July 2012, and 12,988,000 of those inhabitants live in Buenos Aires capital. Civantos puts Arabs as currently “the fourth largest immigrant group in Argentina”, a

title which encompasses Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Egyptians, Moroccans, Iraqis and any other immigrants from the Arab world (Civantos, 2006, p. 7). Cazorla says that Arabs make up roughly one-tenth of the nation's population, where the majority of these migrants settled in Buenos Aires and the northwestern region of Argentina (Civantos, 2006, p. 7). What follows next in the chapter is a written walk-through of my ethnographic observations and experiences, as well as conclusions I have drawn from additional research. The second section also details how I came to formulate my understanding of the construction of Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity in the capital of Argentina.

Upon arriving to Buenos Aires and getting situated on the ground, I detected tell-tale signs of an Arab presence or at the very least, an Arab influence: advertisements for belly dancing lessons, the Arabic last name Haddad on real estate signs, a shop for Arabic delicacies. And fortuitously, I met a helpful staff member at Hostel Arrabal where I stayed during my first two weeks in Buenos Aires. When I told her I was conducting research on the Lebanese population, she passed along the contact information for both locations of *Club Sirio Libanés*. She had studied Arabic in the past, and to my delight, also regularly attended belly dancing classes at *the* school to attend for aficionados in Buenos Aires, the Amir Thaleb Belly Dance School.<sup>34</sup> Yet, these fantastic leads did not exactly yield a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Out of naïveté I believed that—like in Chicago, New York, London or Madrid—I could follow my nose or the writing on the wall or some other indicator of Lebanese-ness to a concentrated origin or community. After all, Syro-Lebanese had poured into the port city by the tens of thousands at the turn of the last century. Instead, I found what seemed to be desultory ethnic emblems up for grabs, but emblems that hung in a still, thick historical silence. This lapse went something like this:

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<sup>34</sup> Amir Thaleb was born in Mar del Plata, Argentina, and is of Syrian descent. Well-known in the belly dancing world, he runs a tight ship. The dance school consists of five one year-long levels, offers Arabic language classes to dancers, regularly hosts workshops, and has a *bazaar* which sells books, DVDs, CDs, and specially crafted sandals for dancers. There is also a dance company which tours internationally. Together with the friendly receptionist and a fellow Kiwi hostel guest, I sweated through an intermediate beginner's class of *DOOM-tacca-tacca-DOOM-tacca-DOOM-DOOM* combinations across the dance room floor.

### ***Telling Random Encounters***

I had just finished “the Hundred”, and my Pilates teacher at Domus Dance Studio in historic San Telmo asked why I had come to Buenos Aires. I replied I was conducting research on the Lebanese-Argentine population.

“There is a Lebanese population in Buenos Aires?”, inquired another Argentine student.

“*Claro que sí* (Indeed)”, I retorted to a mum, but attentive group. I gave a bit of background on the population I had come to study.

Quite a knowledgeable man as I would later discover, my instructor of Italian descent responded by saying there were lots of both Syrians and Lebanese in Argentina, and really they were one in the same.

“Really...”, I pondered.

He then proceeded to tell me how awful and corrupt a president Carlos Menem had been—an opinion of the former Argentinean president of Syrian descent others would share with me time and again.

But the above account of a brief random conversation I had in Domus Dance Studio was not just a one-off experience. Instead, it was a hint that an ignorance of Syro-Lebanese immigration to Argentina could be more prevalent than just among the Pilates-goers of my class. In fact, when telling Argentines of my reasons for criss-crossing the globe I was often met with, “Oh. So, are there a lot?” Although some estimates place Argentines of Arab descent (Lebanese included) at roughly ten percent of Argentina's population, of the many Argentines I met, only a handful were aware that there were even that many, if any.

Thus, I set out to see if Buenos Aires duplicated this historical silence elsewhere. A visit to the National Library yielded two general books on immigration that *perhaps* included something on the Syro-Lebanese waves of immigration, the librarian told me. All the other titles the system generated were about other specific groups—the Spanish, the Italians, the French, the British, for instance. The *Cómic Cultural* (Cultural Comic) series book *La inmigración en la Argentina: Los que fueron llegando* (*Immigration in Argentina: Those Who Continued Arriving*) co-

authored by Oche Califa<sup>35</sup> and Diego Parés (Félix Luna) gives a brief overview of immigration to Argentina in general. It devotes fewer than two full pages to the Arab immigration waves (Syro-Lebanese included). The book recapitulates the Ottoman origins of early Arab immigrants, as well as their rapid adaptation to Argentine culture (such as with the consumption of yerba maté so much that those re-emigrating to the Levant continued the drinking tradition). Further, it touches on their early ambulatory hawking occupations, the location of most Arabs around Calle Reconquista and the origin of the misnomer *turco*.<sup>36</sup> The second book—*La inmigración en la Argentina* (*Immigration in Argentina*)—had developed sections on the immigration of Italians, Sephardic Jews and the French, yet nothing on the Arab migration waves. All other immigrant groups to Argentina were also excluded.

I turned to the internet. *Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros* (National Library of Teachers) returned 29 titles of digitized books for *inmigración* (immigration) to Argentina, zero for *inmigración árabe* (Arab immigration), zero for *inmigración libanesa* (Lebanese immigration) and nil for *inmigración siria* (Syrian immigration). So, I visited bookshops. I browsed for titles on Syro-Lebanese immigration to Argentina, as well as looked for dictionaries and workbooks on the Arabic language. Trips to used, university, chain, foreign language, specialty, independent second-hand discounted shops for university students and liquidating bookstores rendered few results. I frequently found at least one title on Jewish immigration to Argentina, at least one book on general immigration and several on the gaucho culture. *El Ateneo*, one of the largest bookstore chains in Buenos Aires, had in stock one title on immigration to Argentina in its popular *Calle Santa Fe* store: *Historias de inmigración: Testimonios de pasión, amor y arraigo en tierra argentina* (Tales of Immigration: Testimonies of Passion, Love and Roots in Argentina), by Lucía Gálvez. In it there were stories from immigrants of various populations that had arrived to

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<sup>35</sup> *Califa* is the Spanish word for “caliph,” which is derived from the Arabic word “khalifa” )

<sup>36</sup> Professor Liliana Cazorla also said early Syro-Lebanese immigrants first lived around Calle Reconquista; however, a visit to the Buenos Aires government page for *El Observatorio* project of immigration appreciation in the Argentine capital says this group first settled around Calle Alem. Calle Alem runs parallel to Reconquista, and is two streets over. It curves at one point, at which the two then intersect.

Argentina, such as Czech, Irish, Greek, Italian, English, Spanish, etc., and one from the Syro-Lebanese population.

Some occasions proved fortuitous, however. Those of Lebanese, Syro-Lebanese, Syrian or even Arabic descent are well-woven into the Buenos Aires demographic. They are there, and in a matter of weeks, I randomly met several. Serendipitously, the eye-glass specialist who attended me while I replaced my broken specs was of Greater Syrian heritage. I handed over the optical prescription I had gotten at the German-Egyptian Eye Care Center in Maadi, Cairo. The heading on the card was in Arabic.

“This is in Arabic.”

“It is! I study in Cairo, but I'm here conducting research for the summer.”

“*Anda!* (Ohh!),” she responded. “What do you study in Cairo and what is your research about here?”

I replied that I was pursuing a Master of Arts in Middle East Studies, and explained that in Buenos Aires I was researching the construction of ethnicity among the Lebanese-Argentine population. She looked at me somewhat quizzically. Her grandfather had immigrated from Greater Syria to Argentina, she offered. She continued: In the past she had studied Arabic until the pursuit demanded too much of her time. It is a complicated language, she opined, but perhaps, one day she would pick it up again. She spoke matter-of-factly, objectively, yet fondly. After a few minutes, we went back to discussing the frames I had chosen. Likewise, my landlady's partner was also of Greater Syrian descent. Like the eye-glass specialist's grandfather, his grandfather had also immigrated to Argentina.

I was walking through the wealthy neighborhood of *Recoleta* one evening from Roca Museum, and spotted a restaurant of Arabic cuisine. I entered, introduced myself and explained my research topic. “Excuse me, are you the owner?” I said I would be much obliged to ask the man in the white apron a few questions about the establishment and his background. Both he and the woman behind the counter regarded me with some suspicion. Although they declined to give me specific answers beyond “*Sí, somos Árabes*” (“Yes, we're Arabs”), they did graciously allow me to photograph some of the gastronomical selection in the shop. The woman chatted me up while I ate *kibbeh* and *sambousek*, asking friendly questions about my background

and what I was doing in Cairo, Egypt.

“Where are you from?”

“What's your religion?”

“Are you married?”

“No? It's better that way. Go and explore the world first, that's a beautiful thing.”

And in the neighborhood, Once, I found a small bookshop going out of business. The selection of reading material there targeted a surprisingly eclectic clientele. There were English language edition *Elle* magazines from the nineties, horror books in German, Bibles, books in French on how to stay slim. I thoroughly combed shelves and milk crates until I settled upon a small stack of dusty books and magazines in Arabic. Their pages were frayed and yellowed: religious texts, social commentary and other subjects I could not make out for my want of Arabic vocabulary. I purchased a magazine originally from Saudi Arabia entitled *El Dars El Watani* from 1404 AH, which I used to study the language. I was intrigued by the colorful maps and pictures of rockets, ships, spaceships, tanks, helmeted soldiers and men's sports teams.

I supplemented my Saudi Arabian periodical with a book of Arabic grammar exercises by a professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. *Alhamdulillah* and *gracias a Dios!* It turned out to be the only book on Arabic language instruction that I found while in Buenos Aires, aside from one at the university bookstore at *Centro Universitario de Idiomas* (University Language Center). I immediately purchased *Árabe para extranjeros* (Arabic for Foreigners) for over 40 USD (perhaps a testament to the scarcity of its kind in the city, or just to the rapid decline in value of the Argentine peso). Until that point, I had been looking to enroll in Arabic language classes in order to meet *porteños* of Lebanese descent. There was *Centro Universitario de Idiomas*, whose classes I could take as a student at University of Buenos Aires. Both *Asociación de Beneficencia Drusa* (Druze Charitable Organization) and the *Mezquita de Palermo* (the Mosque of Palermo) also offered Arabic language classes that began in August and ran for three months. Then there was the book. I deferred to the option of the grammar book from Spain.

I was surprised to find either of the books. The first of these two gems could very well have come from a member of the Lebanese (or Arab) population itself. The

small stack of social, cultural and religious reading material in Arabic at the liquidating bookstore almost surely belonged to owners who could understand their contents. That they were used, of a high level of Arabic and deposited at an obscure second-hand bookshop indicates a definite purpose for their presence. This is not the same as a copy of *Harry Potter* on the shelf of a major bookstore that may or may not sell. The book of Arabic grammar exercises was one of a pair; the other was a recapitulation of grammar rules (I did not buy this one). They were the only of their kind at this used bookshop close to the University Language Center (which offered beginning Arabic language classes). And this was the only bookshop I found that carried materials on (or in) the Arabic language out of those I visited in Buenos Aires. As the books were from Spain, I postulate they could have been property of a Spanish student studying Arabic in Buenos Aires, who perhaps, off-loaded them before returning home.

On another occasion, I decided to take a guided morning tour of the famous Recoleta Cemetery, final resting place of several Argentine presidents and Nobel laureates, Eva Perón and many another notable Argentine. While briefly explaining the early history of Argentina and why some headstones were in Italian or a language other than Spanish, the tour guide remarked that the country was one of immigrants. She said most were Mediterranean from Italy or Spain; the others emigrated from other European countries, save for a few outliers. I engaged her in a short dialogue on Arab immigration to Argentina: “What about the Syro-Lebanese? Or other Arab groups?” She thoughtfully replied that they came in small numbers. Later, she added that perhaps somewhere outside of Buenos Aires was a Muslim cemetery. Curiously, Lebanese-Argentine author Ibrahim Husayn Hallar was well aware of this blind spot more than half a century ago. In his 1959 *Descubrimiento de América por los árabes* (*Arab Discovery of America*), he says that “The Arab is here incognito, diluted, unrecognized, but he is here” (Hallar, 1963, p. 11).

Professor Liliana Cazorla’s early experience in her field speaks to the same issue of a nation overlooking part of its population. When she began working for the Roca Museum Institute of Historical Research, she specialized in Spanish immigration to Argentina. After learning that none of her colleagues studied the hardly-touched research area of Arab migration to the Republic, she switched her



specialization to fill in the gap. She found no archives, so she began her own—the majority of which are in her home. She visited organizations tied to the Syro-Lebanese population in Buenos Aires and interviewed Syro-Lebanese immigrants of older generations. Many gifted her with their mementos, such as Arabic language newspapers. Cazorla says that today there are more specialists in the field, and greater overall interest in Arab immigration to Argentina. In 1989, for example, the University of Buenos Aires created the *Cátedra en Iberoamérica de Arquitectura Islámica en la Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo* (Chair in Ibero-America of Islamic Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urban Planning) to study an arguably neglected portion of the nation's population.

On a more upbeat note, however, the creation of this position precedes what seems to be a fairly new, but growing trend on the part of the city of Buenos Aires to recognize its diversity, a *mélange* of people which includes the Lebanese population. Take for instance the young, up-and-running project called *El Observatorio de Colectividades* (The Observatory of Populations). Its aim is “to reveal the histories and cultural, social and institutional contributions of the distinct migratory waves that arrived to the city” (Observatorio de Colectividades). For this initiative, the government spotlights forty-four immigrant groups to Buenos Aires: Senegalese populations, to Bulgarian, to Austrian, Korean, Swiss, Cape Verdean, Croatian, Japanese, Syrian and Lebanese (these two populations are treated as one group, although the project acknowledges that Syria and Lebanon are now two independent countries) and on the project goes. The site details basic facts about the groups, and offers examples of how they have contributed to the capital's rich culture and history. There are videos and lists of cultural institutions, as well as the names of pertinent monuments, plazas, streets and neighborhoods around the city. *El Observatorio* website acknowledges that

The ways in which the distinct waves of immigrants have influenced the city are evident in our streets, neighborhoods, monuments, buildings, gastronomical selection, manner of speech, customs and many of the milieux and institutions with which we daily interact. All of this forms part of the *porteña* identity and is the bedrock of this Observatory...We define the city of Buenos Aires as a mosaic of identities, a city that offers multiple approaches to living, a city that

pulsates and vibrates to the rhythm of thousands of sounds which comprise its melody. (author's translation from Observatorio de Colectividades).

To formalize its dedication to celebrating Buenos Aires' diversity, the government has signed an agreement with institutions representing immigrants and their descendents “in protection of the values of coexistence, mutual respect and peace—characteristics of our uniqueness” (El Observatorio de Colectividades). April 19 of every year has been designated “Day of Coexistence in Cultural Diversity”, and April 24 is “Day of Action for Tolerance and Respect Among People”. For the Syrian and Lebanese populations, per Law N° 2.559, the government of Buenos Aires—in conjunction with *La Confederación de Entidades Argentino Árabe* (the Confederation of Argentine-Arab Bodies)—has named the third week of April “*Semana de la Cultura de los Paises Árabes*” (“Arab Country Culture Week”), in which there are cultural activities to celebrate the Lebanese and Syrian populations (Observatorio de Colectividades).

Returning to the notion of a historical silence on the Lebanese-Argentines of Buenos Aires, however, a random sampling of bookstores and libraries for titles about (Syro-) Lebanese immigration to Argentina and Arabic (whether in or about the language), as well as a historical tour of an aspect of Buenos Aires' history sheds some light as to what the general populace has exposure. This includes Lebanese-Argentine and non-Lebanese descendents alike. The availability of books on certain topics can speak to people's general interest, or it can provide commentary on what they might be taught. For instance, a multitude of titles on the gaucho culture could reflect a high interest in the subject, or could indicate a wider trend of educating the populace on the same—for whatever motive.

But situating the idea of a historical silence in the context of ethnicity, how could a long-standing lack of general attention to the Lebanese-Argentine population in Buenos Aires affect the construction of a Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity? And what does this lapse even say? First, I interpret the lapse I detected to mean that early assimilationist policies actually worked, that what need not have been remembered was not necessarily remembered, save for by those for whom it was significant. Argentina—especially Buenos Aires—is a nation of peoples who have melded considerably. As the Latin phrase goes, *E pluribus unum* (Out of many, one). While

certainly a far cry from an indiscriminate Latin race, at least from my observations, everyday interactions do not require a constant reminder of one's ethnic and/or racial identity.

In light of this fact, some members of the Lebanese-Argentine population of Buenos Aires have nevertheless made considerable efforts to keep Lebanese culture alive in the diaspora. There are and have been a solid number of organizations and institutions that facilitate contact with and travel to Lebanon, or provide programs and courses for participants to become more familiar with Lebanese culture in Buenos Aires today. Some have been around for decades. There are non-governmental organizations such as *FEARAB Argentina: Confederación de Entidades Argentino Árabes* (Confederation of Arab-Argentine Organizations), *Unión Cultural Argentino Libanesa* (UCAL) (Lebanese-Argentine Cultural Union) and its branch for younger members of the Lebanese diaspora, JUCAL. There is also the World Lebanese Cultural Union. These institutions organize trips to Lebanon, conduct seminars on Lebanese culture, post historical articles on immigration and provide updates on publications, television programs and radio broadcasts of interest to the Lebanese-Argentine population and beyond. There are social clubs, such as *Club Libanés* (Lebanese Club), *Club Los Cedros* (Cedars Club) and *Club Sirio Libanés* (Syrian-Lebanese Club), which are today, reminiscent of once recreational spots for members of the Syro-Lebanese population to gather and play cards, eat and discuss current events. Then there are other resources, such as *Revista Árabe* (Arabic Magazine), that cover topics on Lebanon, Radio Splendid 990 AM, which plays Arabic music for two hours on Sunday and Radio Monte Líbano 103.9 FM, which advertises itself as an international station. Its objective is “to spread Lebanese traditions, customs, values, history, geography and contributions around the globe” through music, poetry and spoken word (Radio Monte Líbano). From 2003 until 2011, *Desde El Aljibe* (From the Well) aired on Channel 7. Starring Lebanese Maronites, the program introduced the national Argentine audience to Arab culture, language, cuisine, history and politics. Alternately, *Fundación Los Cedros* (Cedars Foundation), *Misión Libanesa Maronita* (Lebanese Maronite Mission), *Oficina de la Cultura y Difusión Islámica* (Office for the Diffusion of Islam and Islamic Culture), *Organización Islam* (Organization of Islam), *Mezquita de Palermo* (Mosque of Palermo), *Asociación de Beneficencia*

*Drusa* (Charitable Association of the Druze) and *Fundación Sirio Libanesa* (Syrian-Lebanese Foundation) provide more particular entrances to aspects of Lebanese and Arab ethnicity, whether through religion, language or culture.

Those interested in learning more about Lebanese (and Syrian) culture can also attend conferences, shows and cooking courses. *Club Sirio Libanés* offers Arabic cooking classes every Thursday, and there are occasional advertisements for private cooking classes posted around Arab-related locales, such as the Church of San Marón. What is more, to commemorate the independence of Lebanon, every year in November *porteños* are invited to attend an elaborate celebration of Lebanese culture called *El Festival Libanés* (“the Lebanese Festival”), complete with dancers, orchestras, singers and traditional folkloric groups accompanied by a show of lights and video. Organized by *la Juventud de la Unión Cultural Argentino Libanesa* (Youth of the Lebanese Argentine Cultural Union), “it is a meeting filled with tradition, music and dancing for members of every institution in the community, from the ‘land of the cedars’”. Since the festival's inception in 2008, more than 2,000 people have attended the show at *Teatro ND Ateneo* (Observatorio de Colectividades). Additionally, the Recoleta Cultural Center hosts a week of tribute to Arab culture, replete with installations of photographs, art work and crafts. The center also offers Arabic workshops, lectures on the work of such poets as Khalil Gibran and Mahmud Darwish and a cooking class which demonstrates how to make traditional dishes from the Middle East. A series of Arabic movies, short films and documentaries are shown everyday of the week, and there are nightly musical and dance performances by well-known artists, Arab orchestras and dance troupes (Revista El Abasto).

But I draw a second conclusion on how an apparent lack of attention towards the Lebanese-Argentine population in Buenos Aires may influence the construction of a Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity. A climate of acknowledgment or lack thereof created by non-members of an ethnic group can contribute to whether ethnic group members feel comfortable expressing their ethnicity. For example, those who are proud of their heritage and sense that others around them know very little about their culture may showcase ethnic symbols if they are in a non-threatening environment. On the contrary, if the environment is less-than-welcoming towards a particular ethnic group and there is no need to broadcast one's origins (such as in competition for resources),

group members may choose to do so inconspicuously. Another possibility is that even in a non-threatening socio-cultural environment, a lack of acknowledgment of one's identity components by outsiders may indicate to ethnic group members that it is easier to keep such information to oneself. What is the point of showcasing ethnic symbols if few outsiders recognize them anyway? Especially if it is possible to navigate the social world perfectly well without them. Expressing ethnic identity in private and amongst other fellow ethnic group members may suffice if there is a desire to feel close to one's roots. If there is a time-space disconnect, Lebanese-Argentines may forgo expression altogether, whether in public or private. But as illustrates the aforementioned list of resources, media, institutes, religious organizations and clubs established to celebrate or disseminate the Lebanese culture, there are Lebanese-Argentines who actively choose to align with and express their Lebanese ethnic identity. The following section highlights some of these instances, and explores how those of Lebanese descent in Buenos Aires reference ethnic emblems from Lebanon to fashion a legitimately recognizable Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity, a simulation of Lebanese-ness.

### ***Specific Examples of Referencing Lebanese-ness in Buenos Aires***

*Catedral de San Marón* (the Cathedral of Saint Maroun) is located on Paraguay Street in the center of the *Capital Federal*. Some of the bricks on the tower facade are tan and white, arranged in the *ablaq* pattern common in Islamic architecture. In the center of the facade is a tri-lobed arch typical of the Fatimid style—I had seen this before in Cairo. At the very top, in the center, rests a concrete inset of a cross pattee. To the left, the wall of the church building perpendicular to the tower boasts the details of the services beneath the declaration, *culto católico* (Catholic worship), and a picture of the patron saint adorns another space along the brick wall. A little farther down sits a large seal: *Misión Libanesa Maronita en la Argentina: 1901 Centenario 2001* (Lebanese Maronite Mission in Argentina: 1901-2001). As of the time I had visited, the Church of Saint Maroun had existed in Buenos Aires for 110 years. But much of the church's current building is relatively new. The construction of the sanctuary concluded in 2001—one year after it began. Curiously enough, the architecture of the church, its inside décor and the rituals of service reveal ways in which members of the

church have created a unique amalgam of Lebanese ethnic emblems which speaks to the church's origins, yet comfortably situates it within Buenos Aires' distinct Latin American culture. After all, the church explicitly states that this was by design: “*La Iglesia San Marón fue diseñada y construida para que sobreviva a las generaciones de feligreses que componen la gran familia maronita, fuerte y resistente como las piedras y perenne y perdurable como los Cedros del Líbano*” (“The Church of Saint Maroun was designed and constructed to survive the generations of parishioners that compose the expansive Maronite family, as strong and resistant as the stones, and as eternal and everlasting as the Cedars of Lebanon”) (Mision Libanesa).

The architecture of *La Iglesia de San Marón* is intentionally historically, ethnically and regionally appropriate. The construction of the church was monitored by three Argentine architects, two of whom traveled to Lebanon to visit local places of worship. While there, they also met with Lebanese craftsmen and expert stonemasons. In turn, seven Lebanese builders traveled to Buenos Aires to oversee the project, the final product a nod to the Monastery of Saint Anthony of Qozhaya located in the Qadisha Valley of northern Lebanon. And the stones used in the construction of the church are even “authentic”. Roughly 520 metric tons of stone were transported by boat from the Lebanese Mountains to Buenos Aires, the altar stones originate from five different quarries in Lebanon and inside of the sanctuary is made up of stones from each of Lebanon's provinces.

While most of the church's building materials are from Lebanon, so is much of the language on display inside. I was surprised by the Arabic script on the altar cloth, as by the names of important religious figures in the Maronite faith. (But how many parishioners can read Arabic script?) And the mission's publication, *El Misionero* (The Missionary), although mostly in Spanish, has subtitles and phrases in Arabic. Tellingly, a portion of the periodical is devoted to helping Lebanese-Argentines visit Lebanon and learn about it, as well as locate and contact their relatives there. There is even the suggestion to obtain Lebanese citizenship. The April 2010 issue addresses an apparently common question among Lebanese-Argentines confronted with this provocation by *Misión Libanesa Maronita*: Why would I want Lebanese nationality? The publication offers the motivations of sentiment and belonging, but also details six practical justifications for pursuing legal status in Lebanon: the right to vote in

Lebanese elections, the right to own real estate in Lebanon, the possibility to enter and stay in the country indefinitely and without visa, the possibility to visit Syria sans visa, to establish a file with the Embassy of Lebanon in Buenos Aires that could serve future Lebanese-Argentine descendents in their interactions in Lebanon, and to receive periodical updates on the goings-on in Lebanon from its embassy in the *Capital Federal*.

And there are parallels between the Church of Saint Maroun and *La Catedral de San Jorge* (the Cathedral of Saint George), another important ethnic and religious fixture among the Lebanese (and Syrian) population of Buenos Aires. *Iglesia San Jorge* is an Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church founded in 1923 in Buenos Aires by Lebanese and Syrian immigrants. Located in the upscale neighborhood of Palermo, it was designed by the architect Kirilos Nasif and consecrated in 1946. According to the church's website, the cathedral was “*Construída en un estilo puramente oriental, adornada con íconos y vitrales que le otorgan un toque de distinción especial y particular*” (“Constructed in a purely oriental style, decorated with icons and stained glass windows, giving it a unique touch”) (Arquidiócesis de Buenos Aires y toda la Argentina).

Although the majority of the religious institution's priests are not of either Lebanese or Syrian descent, Archbishop Siluan Muci is of Lebanese heritage (born in Venezuela). He was placed in the Argentine capital in 2006, years after completing his secondary and tertiary studies in Lebanon, and theological studies in Greece. The parishioners of the church are a mixed bag: There are those Argentines of Lebanese and Syrian descent, and those of other ethnic backgrounds. And the nature of the mass respects this diversity, with nearly all of the service being conducted in Spanish, save for some hymns, which are sung in Arabic.

In the instances of the Churches of Saint Maroun and Saint George, members of the Lebanese (and Syrian) populations have mirrored actual tangible Lebanese ethnic emblems in aligning with a Lebanese ethnic discourse. Physical emblems, such as stones from Lebanon, Lebanese and Islamic architecture and even ways of human interaction, whether through language or custom/ritual, provide visual cues that can announce allegiance to Lebanese-ness to those inside and outside of the ethnic group. They also help to reinforce and contextualize the intangible aspects of Lebanese

ethnicity—the stories, the memories, the knowledge of Lebanon's history and politics.

But beyond just the architecture, décor or rituals of the church, confession of the Maronite faith also serves as a way to reference Lebanese-ness in Buenos Aires. Religion can be a slippery component to any ethnicity, because religious confession is not necessarily a matter of blood, history, culture or location. Humans subscribe to religious discourses because on some level they believe they are “true”. However, the “truth” of a religion is often heavily contextualized within one's history, blood, culture and location (although globalization has considerably shaken up this pattern—think of Catholicism and Christian missionary work that are “true” and “successful” completely outside of the environment in which they developed). For instance, Hinduism (in its various traditions) is a religion (or way of life) originating in India (a vastly ethnically diverse country), and is inextricably tied to its history, politics and culture(s). Yet, it is the world's third largest “religion” after Christianity and Islam. Practitioners inhabit very disparate countries, from Belize to Oman to Fiji, Nepal and Trinidad and Tobago. So, whereas the culture, politics and history of India are inherently bound up in Hinduism, one does not need to be from India or have Indian blood to accept the way of life. However, for those people who are of Indian heritage, subscribing to a Hinduist discourse automatically allows expression of some facets of Indian ethnicity, as these facets are inherently interwoven in the spiritual experience. Although Hinduism manifests as manifold belief systems of slight or major variance, born of very different circumstances and milieux, there are distinctively Indian features among them all: Sanskrit, pilgrimages, mythology and food habits, for example. Such is the case with the Maronite faith. As part one of chapter four details, the Maronite church was born out of the Levant, as were its rituals, the architecture of its buildings (although not a requisite for practicing the faith), language, etc. Maronite history is also inextricably linked with the history of Lebanon, its present day confessional system, its civil wars and waves of emigration.

Any Argentine of non-Lebanese descent can accept and subscribe to the Maronite faith. Doing so and singing hymns in Arabic, reciting liturgies in Aramaic, praying to Saint Maroun and celebrating Maronite holidays does not constitute inclusion in the Lebanese ethnic group/category. However, being of Lebanese descent in Buenos Aires *and* confessing the Maronite faith does mean expressing and claiming



Lebanese-ness, if but for the Lebanese influences intrinsic in the Maronite discourse.

What is more, the modern Maronite community in Lebanon is distinguished from other socio-religious identities in the Arab world for its French and Catholic influences. This distinction can extend to the diaspora as well. Chapters one and four detail some history of the Lebanese Maronite population, its relationship with the French after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, conflicts with the Druze, immigration to other countries and Lebanon's status as a French protectorate. Subsequently, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of being Lebanese Maronite is a(n) (often seemingly) more Westernized background than other groups in Lebanon and other Arab populations in the region. José Sahyoun described Lebanon as the most Westernized and Western country in the Middle East, because it was a protectorate under France. Even the Arabic spoken there is different due to French influences, he said.

But religious confession as an expression of Lebanese ethnic identity is not only limited to the Maronite faith—there are Lebanese-Argentines claiming and expressing their Lebanese-ness through alignment with Druze and Muslim discourses, too. The November 2011 *Festival Libanés* boasted numerous stands along the streets around which the event was held; they were stocked with Lebanese food and handicrafts for sale. *El Centro Islámico Argentino* (The Islamic Center of Argentina) set up one stand in a design “inspired by Islamic architecture”, with books on Islam for sale. The director of the center Fabian Jatib shared that the stall was meant to introduce non-Muslim Argentines and foreigners to Islam and Muslim culture, which are often negatively portrayed in various media. He emphasized that

*Todos los musulmanes que habitamos este país bendito somos gente de trabajo y de paz, somos una comunidad que apoyó muy fuerte el crecimiento de la Argentina, con dos olas de inmigración muy fuertes, la primera en la década del 20 del siglo pasado, y la segunda en la del 40...Hay rasgos de la presencia musulmana en Buenos Aires en distintos lugares, cómo la concentración de la colectividad en el centro comercial de San Cristóbal, o los diseños islámicos en la decoración de varias estaciones de la línea E de subtes.*

All of the Muslims living in this blessed country are hardworking, peaceful people. We are a community that strongly supported the growth of Argentina, with two strong waves of immigration: the first in the 20s and the second in the 40s... The Muslim presence is in different places in Buenos Aires, such as

the concentration of the group in the San Cristobal commercial center, or the Islamic designs in the various stations of the E subway line (La Arena).

Just as with the Maronite faith, the practice of Islam has cultural and ethnic features intrinsically integrated within its fabric. The religious doctrine and rituals associated with Islam must remain intact irrespective of one's location on the globe: *Shahada*, *zakat*, *salat*, *sawm* of Ramadan, *Hajj*, (etc.) do not change. Neither does location change that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, and thus Arabic is the language of Islam, of Islamic prayer. The very fundamentals of the religion are the same whether one reads or understands its language. And although practitioners do modify their manner of worship according to environment—whether by using a different language of instruction (such as Spanish) or adapting to the length of day for fasting (in the Southern Hemisphere), for example—the Arabian culture in which it began remains fundamentally implicit in practice. As Lebanon shares aspects of Arabian culture which are interwoven in the practice of Islam in Lebanon, and because Islam has thoroughly penetrated and influenced Lebanese culture, history, politics and language, the practice of Islam in Buenos Aires can and does propagate Lebanese-ness. Institutions such as the Islamic Center of Argentina may not be exclusively ethnically Lebanese, yet they serve as conduits for propagating Lebanese ethnic emblems.

One Thursday morning, I met with a small group of Argentines outside of the Islamic Center of Argentina in Palermo. It is home to the King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud Mosque, along with an Islamic elementary school, library and cafeteria. There are guided tours every Thursday where curious people, such as the students and retired couples we were, can learn the basics of Islam and tour an impressive compound that dreamily felt as though I were back in Cairo. We entered. A solitary star-shaped fountain stands among marble tiles leading to *ablaq*-decorated archways above three gates. These wrought-iron gates are configured into the geometric patterns of stars—four points, six points, eight points, too many points to count. It is very quiet inside the gated compound with green, green lawns and swaying tree-tops; I stop to read a sign in both Arabic and Spanish. A woman in *hijab* nearby cleans the floor. We visitors congregate around the tour guide, a man in a *galabiyya* who looks to be in his late forties. He explains the germination of the center from an idea in the 1970s to provide Muslims in Argentina with a place to worship, study and spend time

together. He walks us through the foyer, the cafeteria, the school area, the courtyard and we stop in front of the prayer hall. Two monitors display prayer time at Al-Masjid Al-Haram in Mecca. There are a few men inside. He ends the tour in the library, where there is a sizable collection of books in Arabic, volumes announced in calligraphy. We ask questions; the tour guide patiently answers, explains and informs us.

The Islamic Center is not by any means solely Lebanese; it is the brainchild of a Saudi Arabian king. When I asked about the number of Lebanese Muslims who visit the mosque, the tour guide was unable to give me a definitive answer. However, the language, the architecture and the religious practices all speak to a Lebanese discourse, such that those Argentines of Lebanese descent attending the mosque would express some facets of Lebanese-ness by default. Such is the case with the Maronite faith.

But there are other ways in which some Lebanese-Argentines choose to reference their Lebanese-ness aside from religion. Claiming Phoenician roots can and does serve as a bedrock for some interpretations of Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity—albeit, more on a macro level.<sup>37</sup> Phoenicia preceded modern day Lebanon and Lebanon is the origin of the Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity, therefore, Lebanese-Argentines can fairly claim Phoenician heritage and all the connotations affixed to the label.<sup>38</sup> In discussing the immigration of Lebanese to Argentina, the Embassy of

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37 By “more on a macro level” I mean that I observed references to Phoenician roots from the “mouthpieces” (for lack of a better word) of the Lebanese-Argentine population in Buenos Aires (and elsewhere in Argentina): the Maronite church, the Embassy, scholarly works.

38 *Phoenicianism* refers to the theory that modern-day Lebanese are descendents of the peoples of the vast maritime empire of Phoenicia, rather than being of Arab descent. Lebanese scholar and professor, Akram Khater, said in a 2012 lecture at Duke University that “the Phoenician merchant identity...arose in Beirut in the late 19th century following archaeological discoveries of ancient Phoenician artifacts” (Duke Today, 2012, para. 3). According to Khater, soon thereafter, Lebanese Christian scholars claimed these archeological discoveries as part of their own heritage, thus making them ‘heirs to the Phoenician nation’ (Duke Today, 2012, para. 3).

But according to Kamal Salibi (2003), author of *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, Phoenicianists have drawn considerable criticism in asserting that “Phoenicians were the originators of *Liban lumineux*—a luminous Lebanon which...has forever radiated thought and enlightenment to the world in the East and West”, precisely because history has shown otherwise (p. 174). Salibi says that for Arab nationalists, Lebanon was unequivocally present in the “intellectual vanguard of the Arab world”, but prior to was inhabited by primarily “illiterate goatherds and peasants who made no recognizable contributions to world knowledge or culture” (p. 174). According to some

Lebanon relays the story of migration by equating Phoenicia and Lebanon: “*El Líbano, la antigua Fenicia, madre del alfabeto, el comercio y la navegación...*” (“Lebanon, ancient Phoenicia, mother of the alphabet, trade, and navigation...”) (Embassy of Lebanon Online). In such wording, Lebanon is Phoenicia reincarnated and thus, is everything that Phoenicia was—mother of the alphabet, trade and navigation. Or as *Misión Libanesa Maronita* explains, “*La costa libanesa recibirá más tarde el nombre de Fenicia*” (“the Lebanese coast will later receive the name “Phoenicia”), the civilization which is the mother of all civilizations in construction:

During the Neolithic Period (6000 BCE), the Lebanese population was the first to abandon caves and tents in order to construct individual stone houses. These constructions were erected at a time in which Egypt and Chaldea—equally splendid civilizations—used only brick or common wall. This is to say that during this period, the Lebanese coast had already significantly progressed in order to extract the hard rock for the construction of houses... The ancient Lebanese community built houses and tombs: residences for the living and places of rest for the dead. Thus, it appears that in construction Lebanese civilization is the foundation of all civilizations (Misión Libanesa).

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Arabists, if any Lebanese had legitimate claims to Phoenician roots, it would be the Sunni Muslims of coastal towns in Lebanon, who considered themselves Arab.

Salibi further rebuffs Phoenicianism by offering that the claim made by Christian Lebanese lacked “political theory”, instead being pushed mainly by men in the humanities. Salibi says that without sufficient records, it is impossible to reconstruct a linear relationship between ancient Phoenicia and modern-day Lebanon. Archeological remains with some inscriptions, occasional mentions of Phoenician cities in Mesopotamian or Egyptian records or references to the empire in classical literature do not suffice (pp. 174-175).

Still, scholar Andrew Arsan proffers another slant on Phoenicianism, one that claims that Lebanese intellectuals in Beirut, Paris, and Cairo claimed a Phoenician past in order to “make sense of a troubled present” and maintain a connection with Lebanon as “home” (“Citizens of the World...Who Stopped on Every Shore”, 2011, para. 2). That is, appropriating a plausible historical symbol of prosperity and progress allowed the many Lebanese in the diaspora—often afflicted with feelings of loss, displacement and uprootedness—a second chance at a “golden age”. According to Arsan, “Phoenician history gave these emigrants... a sense of cultur[al] purpose”, because they “could also serve as a source of strength, sending home not only remittances but new ideas about culture, society, and politics learned from abroad” (“Citizens of the World...Who Stopped on Every Shore”, 2011, para. 2).

For a closer look at the debate on Phoenicianism, please also see Asher Kaufman’s 2004 book titled *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon*.

Lebanon, which occupies the area of the ancient Phoenician empire is then, by extension, the foundation of all humanity in construction. And the Lebanese Cultural Union of Buenos Aires supports the conflation of Phoenician and Lebanese identities. It has created a documentary entitled *Lebanese Contributions to Civilization*, which details the evolution of Phoenician-turned-Lebanese civilization, and the many ways it has positively impacted the world of agriculture, law, humanities, religion, farming, navigation and construction, among other fields. The first ten minutes of the documentary are devoted to discussing the early origins of Phoenicia and explaining the span of the empire, which encompasses modern-day Lebanon. “Phoenician” and “Lebanese” are used interchangeably (Phoenicia).

But it is worth examining how Phoenician and Maronite references may fit into the construction of specifically Lebanese-Argentine ethnic identity. There are two external factors to consider: one, Argentina's history of assimilationist policies and discrimination towards Arab immigrants, and two, what I found to be a current lack of general knowledge of the Lebanese-Argentine population in Buenos Aires. Claiming Phoenician roots and/or a Western (French) background legitimizes the importance of Levantines in Argentina's history. Phoenicia is the bedrock of modern civilization, with its contributions to the humanities, construction and agriculture. It was a brilliant civilization that gave the world its first alphabet and the blueprint of a vast and successful commercial maritime empire. For the orientalist, Lebanon is a foreign and “exotic” country in a “mysterious” Middle East, but tempered by French culture and education. Lebanese-Argentines may be an ocean and a continent away from what was once Phoenicia and is today Lebanon, yet, they are still its descendents.

Maronites and Phoenicians aside, participation in festivals also proffers a way in which to creatively reference Lebanese ethnicity in a very public way—sometimes in tandem with Argentine ethnic references. Every year for the last six years, *la Juventud de la Unión Cultural Argentino Libanesa de Buenos Aires* has held *Festival Libanés* (Lebanese Festival) during the month of November. In 2012, it was located at the Borges Cultural Center and opened with a wine tasting, in an atmosphere Laura Nievas describes as “like the Qadisha Valley” (JUCAL). There was the *darbuka* player Matias Hazrum, along with Miguel Frasca and Alejandro Coleman playing Lebanese music infused with tango-esque accents and classical influences. Maya

Saloum sang along with the *Juvenil el Faro* orchestra, performing pieces such as the Lebanese national anthem, Fairouz's *Li Beirut* and Fadl Shagr's *Ya Ghayeb*. The popular *debke* group *Firqat Al Arz* from Rosario also performed, and were later joined by JUCAL members and other artists in a final show of Lebanon's national dance (JUCAL).

Public displays of Lebanese ethnic emblems operate much in same way as using the stones of the Church of Saint Maroun or building the minarets of the Mosque of King Fahd: They signal alignment with a Lebanese ethnic discourse by mirroring certain aspects of Lebanese culture and ethnicity in an entirely different milieu separated by distance and time.<sup>39</sup> The songs are the same and the dance steps identical—even in a location similar to the Qadisha Valley. Yet, it all takes place in Buenos Aires, carried out by Argentines of Lebanese descent who may or may not have ever been to Lebanon.

Still, the preservation of gastronomical traditions is another way in which Lebanese-Argentines reference and express their Lebanese-ness—especially when they are cooking for others. I walked into Restaurant Cheff Iusef one evening to the sound of Arabic muzak. I waited to be seated. When I looked down, there was an eight-pointed star design on the floor. A map of Lebanon was on the wall, as well as a framed picture of a man beside a building in what appears to be Lebanon. There were tall red, purple and orange vertically striped booths sandwiching wooden tables, and a wide screen television was perched in a corner airing the Argentina-Venezuela soccer match. On a brick ledge rested two used *shisha* pipes, and the bar was well-stocked with wine and spirits. The restaurant is popular. After a very unscientific look at the patrons, I concluded they resemble the mixed-bag of Argentines I normally saw around Buenos Aires, regardless of the locale. And then my table was ready. The Lebanese bread was *good*—like the bread I eat at Tabbouleh back in Cairo. Pausing

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39 By time, I mean that the Lebanese-ness that those in Buenos Aires express may be chronologically off from those Lebanese ethnic emblems at work in Lebanon. For instance, if Lebanese immigrants arrived to Argentina in the late 1800s and carried with them their knowledge of the *debke*, when and if they passed down this dance to their progeny, it will most likely resemble the 1800s version—even generations down the line. However, the *debke* in its place of origin will most likely continue evolving, so that what is danced in Lebanon in 2013 may look somewhat different to what was danced in the same country a century earlier.

between nibbles, I scanned a very varied menu with names of dishes in both Arabic and Spanish: *empanadas* (fried breaded patties), *bamia* (okra), *berenjenas tostadas* (roasted eggplant), *baklava*. I am ready now: I order stuffed grape leaves, *bamia*, *sambousek* and *baklava*.

After talking to the owner of the restaurant, admittedly, he said food is the primary manner by which he and his family have preserved their Lebanese roots. He does not especially socialize with many other Lebanese or Syrians, does not speak Arabic and has not been to Lebanon. But food is what takes him “home”. Certainly, some recipes have been adapted to the region: The restaurant serves a fair amount of pork and most ingredients come from Argentina—even some of the dishes are a twist of Greek, Lebanese, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine. But as his Arab clientele have told him time and again, the scents, the textures and the flavors remind them of their grandmother's kitchen, of “home”. Food is a common, easy and tasty way to claim and express one's ethnic identity, although food preference alone will not buttress a subscription to any particular ethnicity. However, it does provide a sensual thread that links together many other aspects of ethnic identity. As part one of chapter four states, food is a hugely important angle through which to explore an ethnicity, because of its subtle commentary on the people who created it, their environment and history. Gastronomy reveals the geography of a people, available resources, history as well as belief systems and values.

Finally—and there are countless ways in which Lebanese-Argentines of Buenos Aires claim and express their ethnic identity—there is the recognition, laudation and claiming of notable Lebanese in Lebanese history.

One day, I hit the pavement in search of tell-tale signs of a Lebanese presence in Buenos Aires; that day, I chose the wealthy and posh neighborhood of Recoleta. All the way up *Avenida del Libertador* (Avenue of the Liberator) is the Lebanese Embassy, with its elaborate wrought-iron gate and austere decorations. Walking back from my visit at the embassy, I fortuitously crossed *Calle Líbano* (Lebanon Street). A few meters away are a brick fountain, a bronze sculpture and plaque dedicated to the renowned Lebanese poet, artist and philosopher Khalil Gibran Khalil. There are curved brick benches on which to sit and observe the colorful geometric designs on the floor of the tribute. *FEARAB Argentina* and *Fundación Los Cedros* had worked in

conjunction with individual donors to commemorate Lebanon's fiftieth anniversary as an independent state by paying homage to one of the country's most beloved artists.

In celebrating Khalil Gibran Khalil, Lebanese-related organizations and individual donors recognize the figure's place in Lebanese history, culture and ethnicity. Exalting a person as a representation of a culture or ethnicity lends a very human understanding of ethnic identity. It extends beyond food, dances, politics and even religion in some cases, because the relationship from human to human is unlike any relationship a human has with inanimate objects or intangible qualities. It acknowledges the *blood* aspect of ethnic identity, which is at its core.

### ***On an Imagined Para-National Lebanese Ethnic Community***

In the thesis, I argue that ethnicity among the Lebanese-Argentines of Buenos Aires is a reproduction of ethnicity in Lebanon, the original model. For diasporic populations that have spent little to no time in their “homeland”, expressing “home's” ethnicity requires assembling a montage of ethnic symbols that reference “home”. These could be usage of the Arabic language, dancing the *debke*, learning and teaching belly dance, maintaining Lebanese gastronomical traditions, practicing the Maronite faith, identifying oneself with Phoenician civilization or a number of other references, so long as they are recognizably Lebanese by those both inside and outside of the Lebanese ethnic identity. These ethnic emblems may come from traditions propagated through generations, romantic ideas gathered from family stories, television programs, pictures, festivals, books, time spent at mosques or churches, the internet, etc., as well as from visits “home” and (online or in-person) interactions with populations still in Lebanon or Lebanese descended populations elsewhere in the diaspora.

As chapter three lays out, the relationship between “home” and “host” ethnicities is that of model and copy. In the words of Brian Massumi, “[t]he terms copy and model bind us to the world of representation and objective (re)production. A copy, no matter how many times removed, authentic or fake, is defined by the presence or absence of internal, essential relations of resemblance to a model” (Realer than Real, 1987, para. 5). However, rather than supplanting or negating the original (as Jean Baudrillard suggests of *simulacra* of the third order), like Deleuze, I assert copies can co-exist alongside the original. Within the context of ethnic identities, in



being so far removed in space and time from Lebanese ethnicity, Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity has become its own authentic truth. The relationship then between the model (Lebanese ethnicity) and copy (Lebanese-Argentine ethnicity) is elevated to a status I categorize as model and model-copy, where the latter depends on the former for veracity due to the nature of what it is, yet is an acceptable truth unto itself.<sup>40</sup>

And here Benedict Anderson's notion of the “imagined community” is once again fitting. “Imagined communities” are communities spanning wide distances, founded more upon the imagination of cohesion rather than actual interaction and personal bonds among community members. More explicitly, most members of a given “imagined community” such as a nation, will never meet the majority of other nationals, yet their sense of belonging, loyalty and togetherness in the nation is ever strong. Each member must be capable of imagining certain (and often multiple) binding connections: a shared history, a common language, similar gastronomy, like aspirations (a house, car, several children, a solid Roth-IRA) or a common enemy. In the case of burgeoning national consciousness in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the impact of the Reformation and “the birth of administrative vernaculars” facilitated the linking together of a wider group of people—far wider than members could actually see or experience (Anderson, 1991, p. 41). These new connections were based on new manners of identifying with Europeans a ways away, such as reading books in the same vernacular on topics with which almost everyone could relate, such as religion. Today, there are chat rooms, forums, social media, blogs, news sites, e-zines, websites, etc. These manifestations of the internet instantaneously connect users to each other and to the wider world of information and ideas, which, in turn, can lead to actual physical interactions. Then there is globalization, which democratizes access to the worldwide symbol bank, such that people all over the globe may reference the ethnic emblems of disparate ethnic identities.

The notion of imagined communities serves us when examining the

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40 Why is Lebanese ethnic identity in the diaspora a copy and not an extension of Lebanese ethnicity from Lebanon? Distance, the passage of time and adaptations to “host” countries (assimilation or acculturation) truncate direct relation with the milieu in which Lebanese ethnic identity began, such that referencing it in the diaspora is often a degree or two removed, rather than a matter of direct experience.

relationship between model and model-copy in an ethnic identity context, because it presents a scenario in which the two can become linked. For example, the Lebanese ethnic populations in Lebanon, Argentina, the United States, Canada, Ghana, France and Australia could share common feelings of belonging, loyalty and togetherness to the notion of being Lebanese (or of Lebanese origin). This idea always springs from identifying Lebanon as the source, but community members need not be physically connected to “home”. Knowing that there are others elsewhere in the world who eat similar traditional foods, maintain the same religious holidays, have family from the same village, have the same history of persecution, dance the same dances and may have a longing to better understand “home” can engender rapport that is real. I term the configuration of model linked with model-copies an imagined para-national ethnic community, because members are linked in a way that can so often transcend nationalisms and geo-political borders. And the repercussions of such a configuration can be major.

## Conclusion

Yet, what are the implications of a Lebanese simulated ethnicity among Lebanese-Argentines in Buenos Aires? What does this mean for other diasporic populations?

### *Implications of an Imagined Para-National Lebanese Ethnic Community*

Subscribing to the same identity discourse facilitates bridging subscriptions to other related conversations. An allegiance to a common ethnic identity can lead to political, and in some instances economic and religious involvement where members of this particular ethnic group reside. Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora proffer an appropriate example to this point.

The population of Lebanon is roughly 4.2 million. Estimates of Lebanese in the diaspora hover around 14 million, with seven million in Brazil alone. Argentina is home to around 1.2 million Lebanese immigrants and their descendents. Lebanese citizenship is passed along patrilineally, so that children automatically have Lebanese nationality, and non-Lebanese wives may obtain Lebanese citizenship with the permission of their husband and completion of the proper legal steps. Lebanon does allow dual citizenship, however. According to *Naharnet* and *The Daily Star Lebanon*, in 2011, Article 114 of a draft law passed in parliament on August 10, 2008 specifies that Lebanese expatriates born abroad are eligible to apply for citizenship, which will then allow their participation in elections in Lebanon. Yet, before even considering the impact such a move could make on Lebanese politics, it does well to remember that Lebanese citizens living abroad have been returning home to vote for years. The online newspaper, *The National*, says that because voting by mail is not allowed in Lebanon, Lebanese abroad with nationality in Lebanon instead return home to vote. It is something like “a vote and a vacation” (The National). Says Ali Fawwaz, who flew to Lebanon in 2009 from Benin, “I come back every time there is an election, it's like eating or drinking...My flight was full of Lebanese'” (The National).

Keeping this information in mind, we recall from chapter one that Lebanese Maronites were the largest group to emigrate from Greater Syria beginning in the mid-1800s. Part one of chapter four also details that Lebanon's political system is one termed “confessional”, where representation in government *should* accurately reflect

the country's religious breakdown. Likewise, it is key to remember that Lebanon has not carried out a census since 1932, due to the sensitivity of its political system and the religious sectarian strife on the ground. What then, is the political impact in Lebanon of those Maronite-majority Lebanese who return “home” for every election? But more importantly, what will be the effect of extended citizenship, and consequently, the right to vote, to second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-generation Lebanese in the diaspora?

And yet, we need not frame this question in a purely Maronite context: How does living abroad in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, the United States, Senegal and Australia affect the way one of Lebanese descent digests the politics of Lebanon? How do the politics, history, education, language and culture of host countries affect how those in the Lebanese diaspora relate to “home”—even if “home” is a romantic notion? How could feelings of uprootedness, displacement, loss and nostalgia color how Lebanese in the diaspora view “home”, contribute to “home” and push to change or maintain the status quo at “home”? How could the sum of these individual relations effect change in Lebanon?

Chapter two lays out that ethnic identity is non-essential, that people can choose to identify themselves in other ways, such as race or by adherence to a particular nationalism. It also states that a person's subscription to an ethnic discourse need not be consistent over their lifetime. There are a myriad of factors that contribute to one's decision whether to claim and express an ethnic identity: sentiments such as nostalgia, uprootedness and loss, as well as external factors, such as miscegenation and assimilation (or acculturation) all weigh in. However, among the approximate 14 million Lebanese living in the diaspora, if even only ten percent chose to identify themselves as ethnically Lebanese, political and economic repercussions could be notable in Lebanon. Subscription to an ethnic discourse could easily transfer to a concern for the politics of “home”, when the politics of “home” are so intertwined with defining and sustaining the very idea of what makes Lebanon for those who claim it—even if the idea of Lebanon is hazy or romantic. The politics of Lebanon affect the country's relations with Israel (and by extension, with other countries, such as the United States). They affect the politics of Hizbollah, and determine major events, such as the Lebanese Civil War. They determine whether Lebanese stay at

“home” or emigrate *en masse*. Politics in Lebanon create a climate either favorable or unfavorable for economic growth, such that Lebanese within the borders of Lebanon come to rely on remittances from abroad. According to *The National*, “An estimated \$5 billion flows in to the country every year from Lebanese abroad and deposits have increased since the start of the financial crisis” (The National). In quoting the World Bank, Aspen Institute says that Lebanese in the diaspora “contributed 8.4 billion in remittances to Lebanon [in 2012], an increase from last year despite the economic slowdown the country has witnessed” (as quoted by Aspen Institute).

Among the Lebanese, the politics of Lebanon matter more to those who imagine themselves to be part of a greater community, to those who identify with Lebanon as being their ethnic and cultural source, and who understand that their knowledge of and connection to Lebanon matter. Their vote and pocketbooks do matter at “home”. That is why Lebanese President Michel Suleiman's visit to Buenos Aires (during which members of JUCAL accompanied him) and a trip 120 Lebanese-Argentine youth took to the Embassy of Lebanon in Buenos Aires are notable; they elicit reactions such as Romina Mussi's of JUCAL:

*Fue un orgullo para todos poder pisar un pedacito de suelo del país de los cedros; escuchar las palabras del Embajador Hicham Hamdan quien junto a su señora esposa brindaron una recepción, haciendo referencia a que esa también era nuestra casa, nos hizo sentir presentes por un instante en el Líbano. Vivimos momentos muy emotivos y lleno de esperanzas ya que para muchos de nosotros era un sueño imposible.*

Everyone was honored to step foot on ground from the “land of the cedars”, listening to words from Ambassador Hicham Hamdan during a reception he and his wife held. He referenced that this was our home, too, and for an instant we felt we were in Lebanon. We experienced emotional moments, full of hopes that for many of us were an impossible dream (JUCAL).

And that is why initiatives, such as Project Roots of the United States and [www.vote2013.org](http://www.vote2013.org) are so important. Project Roots reaches out to Lebanese in the United States to assist with attaining Lebanese citizenship and connecting with family members in Lebanon. Vote2013.org aims to inform Lebanese in the diaspora of their right to Lebanese nationality and ability to vote in 2013 elections. It also details political decisions in Lebanon that either hinder or help this effort. Movements such as these link together members of the Lebanese diaspora through the common theme

of shared Lebanese ethnicity. Just as “all roads lead to Rome”, these threads begin somewhere in the world, often with desultory groups seemingly dangling in the ether, and pull them back to Lebanon, the source. I hypothesize that the creators of *El Misionero* of the Church of Saint Maroun in Buenos Aires recognize that getting Argentines of Lebanese descent to learn about Lebanon, visit, reunite with relatives back home and obtain Lebanese citizenship engenders personal connection to and investment in the imagined para-national Lebanese ethnic community. These efforts engender a relationship with Lebanon. Such connections have the power to direct the course of the goings-on back “home”. And this is significant.

### ***Final Thoughts***

As stated in the introduction, the final thesis is a contribution to Middle Eastern, migration, Latin American, nationalism, multicultural, identity and assimilation studies. It explores an interesting cultural junction, where Lebanon and Argentina meet and get acquainted through their progeny's expression of ethnicity—or lack thereof. This work also examines the effects of globalization, miscegenation and assimilation on identity expression, and explores the ways in which ethnicities are formed and evolve, and cultures “cross pollinate” each other.

# Appendix A



## THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

*Documento de permiso para participar en investigaciones*

**Título de trabajo:** La etnicidad casera: Como los libaneses argentinos de Buenos Aires crean su identidad étnica

**Investigadora:** Bianca Kemp

1) Se pide cordialmente su participación en estas investigaciones sobre la construcción de la etnicidad de los libaneses argentinos de Buenos Aires, las cuales pretenden averiguar como se identifica este grupo y cuáles son los imágenes, experiencias, costumbres y comportamientos que relaciona dicho grupo con el Líbano. Hay posibilidad de que las conclusiones de estas investigaciones se incluyan en la tesis, la cual podría ser publicada en el futuro. La duración de su participación depende del método de investigación utilizado puede ser de una ó dos horas.

2) Los siguientes son los métodos posibles de investigación:

a) *Observación:* Los participantes realizan actividades cotidianas relacionadas con el tema del trabajo mientras se les filman. De vez en cuando se toman apuntes.

b) *Entrevista:* Entrevistas informales y voluntarias tienen lugar en sitios públicos. Consisten en una serie de preguntas preescritas sobre la inmigración libanesa y la identidad étnica libanesa argentina, la cual puede abrir la conversación a cualquier otro tema relacionado. Se graban todas las entrevistas por grabadora de voz digital.

c) *Encuesta:* La encuesta se trata de la manera de identificarse en terminos étnicos.

3) Estas investigaciones son poco invasivas, y no son sensibles por naturaleza.

Tampoco involucran a los participantes en riesgos ni en molestias. Los participantes reciben un regalito, no hay otros beneficios de participar en el estudio.

4) Como participante Ud. tiene el derecho de anonimato tanto durante las investigaciones como en la tesis final. Además, su información permanece en posesión exclusiva de la investigadora.

5) Participación en estas investigaciones es por elección propia. Es decir, en cualquier momento antes, durante o después tiene derecho Ud. a rechazar la participación sin ninguna consecuencia negativa. Se desharán todos los datos particulares conseguidos de los que optan por terminar participación en el estudio.

6) Por último, se guarda la información de las investigaciones hasta que se defienda con éxito la tesis. La fecha de la defensa provisionalmente será a principios de diciembre de 2011.

Para realizar las investigaciones se utilizan los siguientes materiales: un cuaderno, un portátil, un disco rígido externo, una cámara y una grabadora de voz digital. Los datos son confidenciales, solo tiene acceso a ellos la investigadora.

Si Ud. tiene alguna duda ó pregunta, póngase en contacto con Bianca Kemp:

¡Muchísimas gracias de antemano por su participación!

Firma \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre y  
apellido \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B

- 1) How did you become interested in Arab immigration to Argentina? Are you of Arab descent? If so, when did your family first migrate to Argentina and why?
- 2) About how many Lebanese Argentines would you say live in Buenos Aires? Is it a population or a community? Where are they located?
- 3) What is the relationship between those of Syrian descent and those of Lebanese descent? 4) What exactly is your specialization within Arab immigration? How does Arab immigration fit into the history of immigration to Argentina as a whole?
- 5) Could you tell me a little about Museo Roca?
- 6) Do you consider yourself Lebanese-Argentine? Lebanese first, Argentine first or no real order? Do you feel you have to choose?
- 7) Have you ever been to Lebanon? If not, would you like to go? If yes, how often do you go? What do you do while there?
- 8) Do you or does anyone in your family speak Arabic?
- 9) What images, people, activities or memories do you associate with Lebanon or being of Lebanese descent?
- 10) Is there any special status that comes with being of Lebanese descent in Buenos Aires? Is there a positive, negative or neutral connotation with having Lebanese origins?
- 11) Do you or does your family practice any traditions or customs from Lebanon?
- 12) Do you share similar opinions about Lebanon and your Lebanese ancestry as your parents and grandparents?
- 13) What does being Lebanese-Argentine mean to you?
- 14) Do you stay current on events going on in Lebanon? How do you receive your information?

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