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# nóesis

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IVÁN ROBERTO ÁLVAREZ OLIVAS, BENJAMÍN CARRERA CHÁVEZ  
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# EL SIGNIFICADO DE NÓESIS

NÓESIS. Este término es griego y se vincula con otro muy empleado en la filosofía clásica: *nous* (razón, intelecto). La elección de este título se deriva de algunas consideraciones acerca de la teoría del conocimiento que se desprenden del conocido símil de la caverna (*República*, VII).

El hombre, que ha podido contemplar el mundo de los arquetipos, esto es, que ha logrado penetrar las esencias, no puede ya contentarse con la proyección deformada del conocimiento sensible. La luz que lo iluminó es la filosofía, que Platón conceptualiza todavía en el sentido pitagórico de ancla de salvación espiritual. Al ser iluminado por ésta, el hombre siente la necesidad de comunicar a ex compañeros de esclavitud la verdad que ha encontrado, aun cuando estos últimos puedan mofarse de él, como lo había hecho la mujer tracia con Tales. La misma alegoría recuerda los descensos al Hades del orfismo y del pensamiento religioso pitagórico.

En el conocimiento, así caracterizado, Platón encuentra diversos grados. El primero es dado por la experiencia, que es de suyo irracional, porque se fundamenta en una repetición mecánica de actos.

Ésta se racionaliza en el arte (*techné*), es decir, en la habilidad adquirida, en las reglas metodológicas, puesto que en dicha actividad se investigan los datos de la experiencia. Entre las distintas artes sobresale la filosofía, porque no examina los fenómenos aisladamente, sino que los ve en su conjunto. Platón llama a esta visión totalizadora “dialéctica”, y dice que ella se alcanza a través del ejercicio de la razón (nóesis).

Por medio de este ejercicio alcanzaremos pues el conocimiento que, para ser válido, debe ser verdadero y tan real como su objeto. Estas consideraciones sintetizan el propósito y el objetivo de esta revista: presentar trabajos que reflejen, manifiesten, denuncien, los diferentes aspectos de nuestra realidad y hacerlo a través del “ejercicio de la razón”, es decir, de la NÓESIS.

*Dr. Federico Ferro Gay (f)*

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### **Resumen**

Los turcos en América Latina comprenden un grupo étnico, cultural y religioso diverso de inmigrantes en la región. A pesar del éxito y la visibilidad de este grupo y su número en muchos países de América Latina, la investigación sobre estos descendientes de los pueblos del Medio Oriente, ha sido sorprendentemente carente en algunas áreas. Este documento, elaborado a partir de la mayoría de la literatura disponible, examina las similitudes entre ellos, lo cual ayudó a diferenciarlos más de los del Medio Oriente, no solo de las poblaciones de nativos, sino también de otros inmigrantes a América Latina, pues persiste la incorrecta etiqueta de “turco” para señalar a una supuesta minoría étnica y como un marcador cultural compartido por varios subgrupos. En este trabajo también se analiza el registro de los turcos en varios países (Argentina, Brasil, Chile y Honduras). El documento pone de relieve aspectos importantes de la experiencia de este grupo, como parte de la diáspora de Oriente Medio en América Latina.

*Palabras clave: diáspora, inmigración, los turcos, levante, Magreb.*

### **Abstract**

Latin America's los turcos comprise an ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse group of immigrants to the region. Despite the success and visibility of this group and their numbers in many countries throughout Latin America, research on these Middle Eastern-descended peoples has been surprisingly lacking in some areas. This paper, drawn from the much of the available literature, examines similarities-which helped to further differentiate the Middle Easterners not only from the native-born populations but also from other immigrants to Latin America and helped the inaccurate label turco to persist as an ethnic and cultural marker shared by a number of subgroups. This paper also looks at the record of los turcos in several countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Honduras). The paper highlights important aspects of this group's experiences as part of the Middle Eastern diaspora in Latin America.

*Key Words: diaspora, immigration, los turcos, Levant, Maghreb*

# Latin America's *Los Turcos*: Geographic Aspects of Levantine and Maghreb Diasporas

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## ***Introduction***

“*Los turcos*” may be Latin America’s least studied ethnic formation, yet they are present in every nation, and with significant concentrations in some regions and cities. While hardly ubiquitous, they are at once familiar figures in the cultural, political, and economic life of Latin America, yet genealogically they represent a phantom category. Despite their name, very few are of Turkish decent. The *turcos* are almost entirely descended from non-Turkish peoples who emigrated from parts of the Ottoman Empire, hence the misnomer “Turk” or “*turco*.” Despite ethnic and religious differences, they have followed similar trajectories in both coming to the Americas, and in becoming Latin Americans. As a result, this has solidified their image as a single entity in the popular imagination. Yet each ethnic fraction continues to think of itself in different ways, while maintaining an ambivalent identity as “*turcos*.” In this paper we discuss some of the aspects and contours of the *turco* diaspora and presence in Latin America. It would seem that it is a wide-open research topic. We have found surprisingly little published scholarly material on some of the groups of *turcos* and their place in Latin America.

## ***Historical Background***

Immigration from the lands of the former Ottoman Empire and the rest of the Middle East to the Americas began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Sephardic Jews from Morocco- which was the only territory along the southern, eastern, and northeastern coasts of the Mediterranean that had not been at one time under the control of the Ottomans- were among the first to immigrate in the 1850s (Klich and Lesser 1996). By the late 1850s the ravages of the Crimean War set another group in motion. One pioneering group of Palestinians left at this time for Chile (Holston 2005). The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had major impacts on the Eastern Mediterranean region. Trade via land routes declined, bringing economic disruptions to various regions and peoples. In turn, violence against the Christians in Lebanon caused



the Turks to relocate these people to the less fertile regions. Maronites and various groups of Orthodox Christians began a mass migration to the New World. Smaller numbers of Muslims and a few Druze also headed to the Americas (Karpát 1985). Some Armenians, especially following the Turkish eradication campaigns, sought refuge in Latin America (Grün 1996). Arabs from the other parts of Southwest Asia and a small number of ethnic Turks also came to Latin America. In total population numbers, Syria and Lebanon provided the most immigrants (Karpát 1985).

On the whole, “push” factors (war, ethnic-religious strife, economic conditions) propelled most of the “*turco*” immigration. However, there were some “pull” factors at work as well. In 1877 Dom Pedro II visited the Ottoman Empire and fomented a great deal of interest in Brazil and South America among the Lebanese and Syrians. Throughout his reign, Dom Pedro II promoted immigration from abroad. Many *turcos*-to-be heeded the call. Some were young men dodging the Ottoman military draft, others were simply seeking new opportunities. Steady waves kept coming over until World War I cut off this flow. After the Treaty of Versailles, large numbers began again to leave the Levant for Latin America (Karpát 1985). A third wave of Sephardic Jews left North Africa as the rising wave of Arab nationalism became more hostile towards them in the early 1950 (Klich and Lesser 1998).

### *Shared Traits*

Whether Jewish, Armenian or Arab, one of their common traits was their disinclination for manual agricultural work. Most host country formal immigration programs sought future farmers or farm workers. The Levantine and North African immigrants chose instead to work as peddlers (Karam 2007; Karpát 1985; Klich and Lesser 1998). This brought initial condemnation by both public officials and the press. However, most of the itinerant peddlers soon became fixed merchants and insinuated themselves into the economic, if not always social, fabric of their communities and regions. Another common charac-

teristic of these groups were closely bound families. In addition, the patterns of settlement all seemed to concentrate in urban areas, on the coast or near rivers, such as Guayaquil, Buenos Aires and São Paulo (Almeida 1996; Almeida 2004; Morrison 2005). While a few immigrant groups (such as the Arabs in Colombia or Sephardic Jews in Cuba) did not immediately settle in an urban area, they rarely stayed in the countryside past the first generation (Klich and Lesser 1998; Almeida 2004). The host societies struggled to categorize the Jewish, Armenian and Arab groups. What protected them from being labeled as undesirables was their economic success (Karpát 1985). Finally, while there was definitely acculturation, each group was somewhat of an outsider in society.

A noticeable split occurs among the group in terms of their original intention to make their home in the New World. Certainly the Armenians did not plan on returning to live in their homeland again. However, the Palestinians in Chile and Honduras, some of the Sephardic Jews from North Africa, the Orthodox Christians from what is today Syria as well and many Maronites intended to go back home. As a result, there was an unusually high rate of return- perhaps as much as a third of the Middle Eastern immigrants returned to the Eastern Mediterranean (Karpát 1985).

Among those that remained, something of a hybrid identity was forged. Although the label “*turco*” may not be fully embraced by those that fall under its rubric, it is generally understood by both those of Levantine and North African origins and the rest of Latin American society that the “*turcos*” are distinctive, yet they have succeeded in largely assimilating into the local and national cultures in which they reside. The creation of the label Syro-Lebanese has been one of the most interesting outcomes of this immigration. This is a term that has no root in the Middle East. The Orthodox peoples from what is now Syria and Maronites from Lebanon (the vast majority of the immigrants from these two countries belonged to these denominations) have always been aware of their differences and certainly were aware of the creation of these two nations. Yet the term Syro-Lebanese may

have been used to bring unity in a society where some latent hostility could be felt (Karpát 1985).

The term *turco* has mostly been rejected in most ways by the immigrants and their descendants. The Armenians, who fled because of violence committed by the Turks, are the most outspoken in throwing off the term though the Syrian and Lebanese descended groups have, at most, only tolerated this word. However, there are instances when the Sephardic Jews as well as other descendants of Eastern Mediterraneans have used the image of the Turks to evoke an exotic image and differentiate their businesses from similar ones, such as a Jewish-owned café in Buenos Aires (Klich and Lesser 1996).

One common feature seen in the immigration was how people from the same region would settle in the same city or area in the Americas. The Lebanese community in the Yucatán Peninsula was mainly composed of immigrants who came from a handful of villages near Mount Lebanon (Rámirez 1994: 459). The Lebanese who immigrated to Colombia's Loricá region also originated from just a few places. The Armenians who settled in Sao Paulo mostly came from Western Armenia as well as the Cilicia region of Turkey (Grün 1996). Most of the Palestinians in Honduras were descended from immigrants who came from Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahur (Zabel 2006). Similarly, most of the Palestinian community in Chile came from Nazareth (Luxner 2002b).

The *turcos* occupied an unusual place in early society. They were hard to classify in the prevailing racial systems. They were not the North or Western European types so desired by the Latin American officials who supported immigration. However, many of the Middle Eastern immigrants were indistinguishable from the criollo/blanco populations (Moya 2004). The *turcos* also did not fall into the undesirable racial categories that the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American elites wanted to avoid (Karpát 1985). Many Latin American officials, who still dreamed of a society built on agriculture, disapproved of their peddling ways (Lesser 1994; Truzzi 1997; El Attar 2006). On the other hand, the *turcos* achieved a high rate of success and were generally law-abiding, so the officials did not make any real attempts to

halt their immigration until the late 1920s, when nativist movements became popular (Klich and Lesser 1998; Klich and Lesser 1996; Karpát 1985).

The disdain initially directed towards the *turcos* for their proclivities for peddling was also shared by some members of the general population, who were attracted by the agricultural worker archetype. The *turcos* were seen as profiting off the hard work of others. These immigrants' frugality caused them to be labeled as stingy. This contributed to an image of the *turcos* as untrustworthy. Nevertheless, such images failed to rouse these members of the population. To be sure there were some rants against the *turcos* by newspapers and public figures but these were normally based on cold calculations. Such speeches sprung from the economic motives (one example is that of businessmen in Lorica who paid a newspaper to rail against immigrants from Lebanon, whom they saw as threatening to take over a market they had previously held) and political (such as the successful campaign to bar Assad Bucaram from running on the presidential ticket due to his grandparents not being born on Ecuadorean soil) (Viloria 2004; Almeida 1996). The public seemed to like the cuisine of these immigrants and had a high regard for the traditions of those from the Mahgreb, though Arabs from this region came in sparse numbers to Latin America (Klich and Lesser 2005). The *turcos* may not have been universally liked but on the other hand there is no evidence that they were seen by the general public as an enemy or a threat.

Though no real movements against the *turcos* resulted, life could still be uneasy in some cases. For example, in Argentina some murders of *turcos* received only the minimum of police investigation. Some of this deliberate inattention had to do with the power and influence of the perpetrators and it is possible a real effort might have occurred only if the victim had been of a similar status as the criminal. As a result of this immigrants would on occasion ask a foreign power to intervene for them when it seemed as if justice could not be had anyway. The Sephardic Jews who came from Morocco to Brazil asked for and received the help of the British government on a few occasions. In Argentina France and the Ottoman Empire supported the

*turcos*, whose number one problem was the large amount of unsolved murders (Klich 1993).

#### *Assimilation Strategies*

The Arab *turcos* tried to combat the negative images from early on. One of the first attempts by these immigrants to show the rest of the populace to show they had common ground was evoke the rule of al-Andalus, the time when the Moors ruled over Spain (El Attar 2006). No doubt the immigrants were thinking of the cultural achievements of the time period as well as the fact that the Iberian Peninsula was then unquestionably the most advanced part of Europe. This backfired, as the former Latin American colonies had significant sentimental ties with Spain, and this only brought up memories of the long struggle by the people of the mother country against their hated rulers. Later attempts to make a favorable impression on the other Latin Americans showed more cultural understanding.

Perhaps one of the most interesting trends in the Levantines' attempts to connect with the larger population has been their attempt to reinterpret some Latin American trends as springing up from the Eastern Mediterraneans themselves. This extends far beyond the Mediterranean stereotypes and claims that the origins of some Latin American customs come from Middle Easterners themselves. The legend of Marataize, which says that a town in Espírito Santo is supposedly named after a peddler named Aziz, is one bold claim. Other promoters of the *turco* culture would claim that *churrasco* and the *bombachas*, which so readily bring up images of South American gauchos, are derived from Lebanese traditions. The foundations for such claims lay in some trends in Brazilian culture. One popular fancy was that King Solomon, "ancestor of the Syrians", once had made a journey as far as the Amazon and that both the Andean highland language Quechua as well as Portuguese came from Hebrew (El Attar 2006). The search for the Moorish elements present in Brazilian culture caused some intellectuals to conflate North Africa and the Mediterranean states and as a result some questionable and now discredited claims became accepted by many prominent Brazilian thinkers (Lesser 1996).

However, most of the ways that the *turcos* tried to improve relations with their neighbors were not as disastrous as the al-Andalus evocation nor as attention-grabbing as claims to be the source of *bombachas* and *churrasco*. Something that was more typical would be the Syrian and Lebanese immigrants established charity hospitals for whole communities (Morrison 2005; Moya 2006). The second generation of the Syrian and Lebanese communities also became more vocal and opposed the negative images that others published. Most of it came in letters to the editor pointing out the unfair elements of descriptions of the Syrians and Lebanese. Satire also was a response (Viloria 2004).

The Armenians blended in by appealing to the ideal of the fair-haired immigrants desired by the elites, emphasizing the suffering they experienced under the Ottoman Empire and brought up the role of an Armenian king in fighting against the Turks during the Crusades (Grün 1996).

The changing of last names was another way the *turcos* tried to fit in. Many Arab names were altered to a suitable counterpart. Sometimes this happened in the first generation, as was done by many Syrian and Lebanese immigrants who came to Colombia (Viloria de la Hoz 2004). In others this happened later, such as in the third or fourth generation, which became more common Arabs in southern Mexico (Ramírez 1994: 479). Still, a large number of last names remained unaltered.

#### *Intercommunal Relations*

Today the ties to their homelands have been fully embraced. Social clubs in Brazil and Chile, for example, all bear the name of a city or people in the Middle East. Sao Paulo has Club Homs and Club Zahle (Morrison 2005). In Santiago there are Club Palestino, Club Árabe, and Omar Khayyam (Luxner 2002a). In cities throughout South America with sizable Arab populations such script is still used on some restaurants and other buildings.

The Rua 25 de Marco of Sao Paulo is perhaps the most famous street associated with immigrants from the Middle East. It is popu-

lated mostly by immigrants from Lebanon, Armenia and Syria. Few places in Brazil have been so closely associated with peddlers or mas-cates. Each would use their earnings from peddling to achieve success in several industries, though a few would be strongly associated with the subgroups of the *turcos* in the public mind. For the Arabs and Jews it was the textile industry. For Armenians shoes would be the items they became known for (Klich and Lesser 1996).

Also remarkable was that how for the immigrants the hostility that existed between some groups in the Middle East disappeared. Though conflicts with the Druze and Muslims were one of the reasons that caused a mass migration of the Maronites, they managed to live side by side peacefully with them in South America (Karpát 1985; Klich and Lesser 2005). Indeed, there are no records of communal conflict in the Americas. The immigrants, whatever their ethnicity or religion, were quite conciliatory towards one another. Newspapers published by Christians reached out to Muslims (Morrison 2005). Some of the few ethnic Turks who actually came to Latin America lived in a neighborhood colloquially known as Armenia in Sao Paulo (Karpát 1985). Decades later, during the devastating Lebanese civil war, tensions were unquestionably raised between Brazilians of Syrian and Lebanese descent but hostility failed to break out. A high school girl perhaps best exemplified the thoughts that kept these two together: she visited Lebanon after the civil war ended deplored the destruction but said that she did believe that a spilt should arrive in the Brazilian Syro-Lebanese community as a result of this (Karam 2007).

Despite the high level of tolerance of each group of the *turcos* for each other some distance unmistakably remained. Each religious and national group tended to marry inside the community. In other words, a Greek Orthodox would marry a Greek Orthodox, a Maronite would marry a Maronite and so on (Karam 2007; Klich and Lesser 1998). Even in Buenos Aires, where a large number of *turcos* are found, the Syro-Lebanese seem to have settled in neighborhoods where others of the same religious denomination predominate (Brieger and Herzkowich 2002). There are some exceptions. Some of the early generations of Armenians and Christian Arabs intermarried in Argentina

and Brazil (Klich and Lesser 1996). The case of Muslims is harder to interpret. There are certainly examples of Muslim families from the early 1900s in the Americas but it has been noted that those who came had one of the smallest rates of female immigration of any group (Karpát 1985). One author has hypothesized that most of the Muslim men, not able to find a spouse who was of the same religion, Religion played different roles in the community. For the Armenians, the church served as the center of their society (Grün 2006). Islam, on the other hand, took a lesser role. A large number of the followers of Islam who came to the Americas converted to Christianity and others—especially in the second generation—became nonpracticing Muslims or Christians (Karpát 1985; Karam 2007). Some still maintained their religion and one of the largest mosques in America was built in the early 1930s in Brazil (Klich and Lesser 1996). Yet, Islam had only a slight amount of visibility in the Americas. For the Maronites and Orthodox, religion was important but failed to be the center of the community. The churches and cathedrals were community centers but in the end ethnicity and language bound these sect members together with others in the Americas (Klich and Lesser 1998; Hyland 2011; Humphrey 2004; Marín 2008).

#### *Cultural Traits*

Ethnicity served to determine the identities of all the groups that fall under the designation *turcos*. The Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinians and the handful of others from countries such as Iraq and Egypt consider themselves Arabs though the subdivisions still exist and matter (Klich and Lesser 1996). The Sephardic Jews mixed into the overall Jewish populations of whatever country they went to. The Armenians had the most success in staying free of the designation *turco* and were perhaps the hardest group for the authorities to properly classify in the racial hierarchy.

Though there is no doubt that the people of Lebanese descent in this region consider themselves Arab. Yet their identity takes a narrower ethnic element with the frequent use of Phoenician in self-description. One Arab nationalist in Brazil emphasized this ancient



people and ancestors of so many people of the Eastern Mediterranean when defending the new immigrants as civilized. Phoenicians are most evoked when these immigrants are explaining their economic success. Whether in Mexico or Ecuador, these *turcos* say that a high level of skill in trade and business was inherited from the Phoenicians. Though such claims are questionable, they serve as a way of reinforcing group identity among these people (Moya 2006).

Transnational ties have always been strong among these groups but these bonds are most noteworthy among the Syrian and Lebanese. These two peoples for most of the early years of immigration had the highest rate of return to their home countries (Karpát 1985). Ties between family members and business partners extended through the Americas and reached the Arab world (Klich and Lesser 1996; Karpát 1985). The Lebanese president Camille Chamoun visited South America in the early 1960s. Companies in the Middle East successfully aim homeland tours at the Syrian and Lebanese in Brazil and Argentina. In the early 2000s Syrian Brazilians cast votes in the South American country that were part of the Syrian plebiscite process (Morrison 2005).

The preservation of language among each group has differed. Among the Sephardic Jews, Arabic and Ladino both seem to be in danger of dying out as fewer younger members are interested in learning either (Alfaro-Velcamp 2006b). Arabic use has predictably decreased among descendants of Arabs but it seems to be in the process of making something of a comeback among the younger generations (Morrison 2005). None of the Armenians are vocal with fears that their language is going to die out though inevitably its use has declined (Grün 1996).

#### *National Destinations*

The *turco* immigrants to Mexico consisted of Sephardic Jews as well as Arab immigrants. A large number of these Sephardic Jews were from Morocco and Turkey but many were from Syria, including Damascus and Aleppo (Roniger 2010; Alfaro-Velcamp 2006). The Arabs were mainly from Lebanon. They settled in Mexico City, the

state of Yucatán, and the cities of Veracruz and Puebla. One of the products peddled by these immigrants was jewelry. After moving past the peddling stage, the immigrants, aside from textiles, sold real estate, alcoholic drinks and, in Mérida, henequen (Alfaro-Velcamp 2006a; Ramírez 1994). As with similar groups in other countries, the economic progress continued until a high number of them were in the upper class. Mexico today has around a half a million people of Lebanese and Syrian descent and twenty thousand Sephardic Jews (Alfaro-Velcamp 2006b).

Christian Palestinians far outnumbered any other immigrants from the Middle East to Chile and account for around ninety-five percent of the total number (Holston 2005). The Christian Palestinians were also among the earliest immigrants to Latin America, with only the Sephardic Jews in North Africa who left for Brazil following the outbreak of the second Moroccan-Spanish War reaching the Americas ahead of them. The Palestinians left due to the effects of the Crimean War. These Chileans had their success in both peddling and agriculture, something that was unusual for other groups of *turcos* (Bray 1962; Zabel 2006). They had a presence in both the largest cities, including Santiago and Valparaíso, but also were readily found in small villages. According to an old Chilean saying, each village has a policeman, a priest and a Palestinian (Holston 2005). The population of the Palestinian community is estimated to be around 350,000.

Christian Palestinians also make up almost all of the *turcos* (the total population is around 200,000) in Honduras. The vast majority of the Palestinians were from Betlehem, Beit Sahur and Beit Jala (Luxner 2002a, Luxner 2002b). Unlike those in Chile, a large part of the Palestinians in Honduras planned to- and did- return home. These Hondurans entered Honduras simply because of a desire to be someplace in the Americas or were the victims of unscrupulous people whose aid they had sought in making the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean (Brettell 1993; Zabel 2006). Nevertheless, they found success and as conditions in Palestine worsened for Arabs there was less incentive to resettle there. The creation of Israel and the enormous barriers faced by them in any attempt to return meant that they

stayed in Honduras (Zabel 2006). By then, most of the Palestinians had settled in the city of San Pedro Sula, where they form a large part of the population today (Luxner 2002a). The legal obstacles faced by the Palestinians within the country were steep and stopped their involvement in politics for some time (Zabel 2006). Nevertheless in the 1990s, one member of the Palestinian community, Roberto Flores, became president of Honduras (Luxner 2002b).

In Cuba the Sephardim made up most of the Jewish population. Moroccan Jews began arriving here shortly after Cuba's independence in 1902. The numbers of the Sephardim increased in the early 1920s after Turkish Jews from Thrace and the European half of Istanbul fled the Greek invasion of their home country (Bejarano 2002). The Jewish population was small and while some politicians didn't hesitate to vilify them, these people overall were well-treated. The Sephardim and the various groups of Ashkenazi never became close so the Jews in general were quite fragmented (Kaplan 2010). When Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, ninety percent of the island's Jews left the country. The few who remained were Sephardim (LaPorte, Sweifach and Strug 2009).

Argentina attracted a wide range of immigrants from Syria and Lebanon beginning in the 1880s. Once again, the Orthodox and Maronites made up the largest part of the immigrants though there were substantial numbers of Muslims and a small number of Druze (Klich and Lesser 1998; Brieger and Herszkowich 2002). A small percentage of Armenians fleeing from the massacres and Turkish Jews from Izmir and Anatolia who left to avoid the ravages of war after the country was avoided (Liebman 1981; Bejarano 2002; Marquiegui 2002). These immigrants had mixed experiences in their new country. As mentioned before, the Argentinian justice system sometimes would not work for them (Klich 1993). On the other hand, they attained a similar level of economic success in the other countries of Latin America (Klich and Lesser 1996). Also, these immigrants attained a number of powerful positions-including consulates, ambassadorships and generals- faster than the Middle Eastern immigrants in other countries (Klich 1996; Jozami 2002).

Brazil has the largest population of *turcos* and they are mostly Arab with some Armenians and Jews. Sephardic Jews led the way and they settled in the south, in Pará (Lesser 1996). When the first massive wave of Arabs followed in the 1880s, they were mostly of Lebanese and Syrian descent and would go to Pará, Río Grande do Sul and Sao Paulo (Morrison 2005). Most of these were Maronites; there were also some Greek Orthodox and a smaller group of Muslims (Lesser 1996; Karam 2007). A small group of Armenians came to work on the ports of Santos and Río de Janeiro in the late 1800s. Many more Armenians came in the 1910s, fleeing the widespread violence directed against them by the Ottoman Empire. The Brazilian *turcos* were some of the most vocal of the Middle Eastern immigrants to the Americas. The Armenians became the most successful group in dissociating themselves from the *turco* label while the Arab newspapers of Brazil received some of the strongest followings in the Americas (Grün 2006; Karpát 1985). The *turcos* mixed in with society well. Today over a million Arab “*turcos*” live in São Paulo alone (Morrison 2005).

### **Conclusions**

Successful *turcos* include a long list of people famous throughout not only their countries and the region but also the world. In entertainment, actress Salma Hayek and the superstar singer Shakira are recognized throughout the world (Cawley 2003; Holston 2007). The Mexican businessman Carlos Slim Helú has the distinction of being the richest person alive (Saltzstein 2011; Yabroff 2008). A number of people of Arab descent have held the presidency in their countries, including Carlos Menem of Argentina, Abdalá Bucaram of Ecuador and Carlos Roberto Flores of Honduras (Klich and Lesser 1996). Although the *turcos* maintain a sense of ethnic identity in varying degrees with their ancestral places of origin, they are also very much citizens of the country their parents and grandparents moved to. One can only speculate as to whether succeeding generations will continue to identify with these places of origin, or occupy subcultural niches within the national societies. Given that the recent currents

of globalization have tended to produce both cultural particularism as well as homogenization, it is likely that elements of the Levantine and Maghreb diaspora will live on in Latin America for a number of generations to come.

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