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The "Turks" of Latin America. Remarks on the Problems of Syrian-Lebanese Emigration.

The majority of the people referred to in Latin America as "Turks" are of Arab origin. The immigrants who arrived to Latin America from the Ottoman Empire in the big immigration wave lasting from the last decades of the previous century to the beginning of World War I. were called "Turks" by the people of the street in most countries. The sole exception is probably Cuba which was still a Spanish colony when the immigration wave was taking shape. Spanish tradition prevailed there and the popular language of the street named the Arab immigrants arriving to the Isle "Moors". Those concerned who mostly came from the Syrian and Lebanese provinces of the Ottoman Empire usually protested against being called "Turks". This protesting attitude of everyday people is expressed in the literature of Latin America as well. Their feelings are communicated to literature-lovers all over the world by the protagonist *Nacib* in the novel "*Gabriela. Carnation and Cinnamon*" (*Gabriela. Cravo e Canela*) by the outstanding Brazilian writer Jorge Amado. Nacib couldn't stand being called „Turk“, irritably refused the nickname and even was furious about it sometimes: "Your very own grandmother, that's who a Turk is!" he kept saying, than he added emphatically: "I am a Brazilian, son of Syrians". In case the Brazilian partner defended his standpoint by arguing that all strangers, Arabs, Turks, Syrians are all the same as far as he is concerned, Nacib revealed the regrettable gaps in the partner's knowledge of history and geography. More over he added: „Turks are bandits, the worst possible breed. Being called Turk is a deadly insult for a Syrian."¹

Protesting was for no avail in both fiction and life. „Turk“ as a nickname stuck to Arab immigrants in Latin America. Similar misunderstanding can be noticed in connection with other immigration groups as well. *Polaco* (Polish) functioned as a synonym for Jewish for a while in many Latin American countries since after World War I. there were a lot of Jews among the people emigrating from Poland. *Húngaro* (Hungarian) tended to mean Gipsy among others in a couple of Latin American countries in the first half of our century, because of the so-called Hungarian Gipsies emigrating at the end of the last century from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to Argentina than from there spreading to the different parts of the continent. Though they gave only a fragmentary bit of the emigrants still their colourful, market-trading way of

1 AMADO, Jorge, *Gabriela /Gabriela. Cravo e Canela*, (Európa, Budapest, 1982), 43

living caught people's fancy more vividly than the industrious but dull everyday labor of the agricultural workers who gave the majority of the Hungarian emigrants.

The subjects of the Ottoman Empire turned up in Latin America in the last decades of the "long 19th century" terminating in 1914. Earlier than that only a small number of occasional appearances occurred. In the colonial age the Spanish authorities from the very beginning forbade the immigration of Jews, Moors (Arabs), Moriscos and their descendants to the Indies. The Portuguese were less concerned by the *idea of purity of blood*. So we can agree with Gilberto Freyre who states that in the veins, in the culture, in the habits of Portuguese colonialists widely different – Portuguese, Arabic, African – elements were mixed². But in the physical sense of the word no Arab presence can be reckoned with in Portuguese Brazil in the colonial period.

The first decades of independence did not favour Arab immigration either. In the major part of the 19th century the elites of Latin America were preoccupied with the idea of "whitening" their countries, to diminish the rate of undesirable "races" – Indians, Negroes, the castas – within the population. Theoretical thinkers argued for encouraging European immigration. But even Europeans were not generally preferred. For a long time the Latin Americans would have liked to attract "Nordic races", above all Anglo-Saxon, German and Scandinavian settlers to their countries. The Spanish were devaluated because their characteristics were deemed unfavourable. Certain Latin-American theoretical thinkers like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–1888.) thought that the Spanish character had been deformed by the centuries-long influence of the Inquisition, by the lack of democracy and the tradition of self-government. Others, like Carlos Octavio Bunge (1875–1918.) emphasized that the Spanish turned into Afro-Europeans in a certain sense because of the characteristics of their peninsular history, of blood mixing with Jews, Arabs, Africans, of intermarriages³. Other peoples of the Mediterranean or of Eastern or Middle Europe did not even figure in theoretical concepts. The best-known theoretician of 19th century immigration-concepts, Argentinian Juan Bautista Alberdi argued also for white European mass-immigration. He was the one who in his famous book (*Bases...*, 1852.) coined the slogan: "*Gobernar es poblar*" (To govern means to people)⁴. The idea of the Argentinian nation based on European stocks was not far away from the concept of the eminent Cuban abolitionist José Antonio Saco (1797–1879.) who aimed at "whitening" Cuba. He thought that forbidding slave-importation would lead to the gradual disappearance of the blacks whom he deemed incapable of living, and then parallelly with this the European

2 FREYRE, Gilberto, *Udvarház és szolgaszállás /Casa-grande e senzala/* (Gondolat, Budapest, 1985). See e.g. 239–336

3 See: HELG, Aline, "Race in Argentina and Cuba, 1880–1930: Theory, Policies, and Popular Reaction." In: Richard Graham ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1990), 37–43

4 See: ANDERLE, Ádám, *Nemzettudat és kontinentalizmus Latin-Amerikában a XIX. és a XX. században* (Kossuth, Budapest, 1989), 82–86.; HELG, op.cit. 38

immigration and the increasing Creol birth-rate together would put the Cuban nation on white base⁵.

But reality resisted these theories. In the first half of the 19th century Latin America was not economically attractive for European immigrants. Government-aided settlements (Swiss and German settlers in Brazil, Argentina and Chile) did not bring considerable success. The economical boom from the 1870ies, the increasing demand for the products of Latin American agriculture (sugar, meat, wheat, coffee, cocoa etc.) on the world market and as a consequence the demand for labour force urged the leaders of the underpopulated Latin American countries to revise their immigration policy. Governments gave up *Nordic theories*, opened up the gates for the immigrants and reconciled themselves with the fact that the majority of the newcomers – masses in millions – consisted of formerly devaluated South-Europeans (Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese). Formerly despised East-Europeans (Hungarians, Poles, Jews, Russians) also arrived in vast numbers. And Arabs of course, subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Considering the 19th century characteristics of the economical development of the Mediterranean and the conditions and routes of emigration, their migration process can be regarded as an organic part, a branch of the Mediterranean steam of people.

The common characteristics of the Mediterranean emigration process can be attributed to the retarded development of the area. The impacts of West European development like the increasing demand for agricultural products, the transplantation of the results of the industrial revolution to certain sectors of the economy, the improvement of agricultural techniques, the demographical increase and relative overpopulation all reached the Mediterranean roughly in the same time, that is, in the third quarter of the 19th century, though they did not manifest themselves with the same intensity in different countries. But the tension represented by them proved to be sufficient everywhere (including the Near-Eastern and North-African regions of the Mediterranean) to break up traditional economic and social conditions and to urge the most mobile groups of the population to improve their living conditions even if emigration the cost may be.

Between 1830–1930 cc. 11 million Europeans, that is one fifth of the total transatlantic great migration chose a Latin American destination. The dominant role of the Mediterranean is unambiguously indicated by the fact that 38% of them were Italian, 28% Spanish and 11% Portuguese⁶. The so-called "*minor emigrations*" and among them the "*Turks*" streaming out of the Ottoman Empire are less easy to track statistically but opinion prevails that among the new settlers of Latin America there was a considerable contingent of people setting out from the three anachronistic empires of Russia, Austria-Hungary and Turkey. The majority of the immigrants settled down in

5 See e.g. HELG, op.cit., 39

6 MÖRNER, Magnus, *Adventurers and Proletarians. The Story of Migrants in Latin America* (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1985), 50

Argentina (1851–1924:46%), in Brazil (33%) and in Cuba(14%). Uruguay and Chile were also popular countries⁷

To get accurate data about the overall number of the so-called *Syrian-Lebanese* emigration needs further investigations. The relevant statistics are inaccurate and unreliable in the Ottoman Empire and in the receiving countries as well. Data from Turkish sources are problematic e.g. because the majority of the subjects of the empire could not get a passport until 1898. Province Lebanon enjoyed considerable autonomy within the empire so its inhabitants were exceptional because they could easily obtain documents for travelling between the provinces and even abroad. In the big starting ports of transatlantic crossing (Genoa, Naples, Marseille, Barcelona) they could transfer these papers for the official passport of the empire, paying the appropriate sum of course. This is why so many emigrants coming from other provinces touched first Syrian and Lebanese ports (e.g.Beirut, Tripoli,etc.). Quite a lot set off without documents. Emigration agents sailed them off in small boats, transferred to bigger ones after leaving the territorial waters of the empire, and transported to the starting ports of transatlantic crossing or directly to America. The practice of travelling without documents endured even after the passport limitations were lifted. Emigration agents sometimes actually argued their clients out of getting the passport, convincing them that the travel costs were lower this way.

Let two particular problems of Latin American statistics be mentioned here. Problem number one is that certain parts of the immigrating Arabic crowd did not stay and settle in the original country of destination. They wandered further from Cuba to the U.S.A., Haiti or Mexico;from Argentina to Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia and Peru; from Brazil to Colombia, etc. About this migration process especially in the case of inland travelling hardly any registration was attempted by contemporary statistics. We have to take into consideration the back-migration factor as well. The Arabic immigrants in Latin-America show identical tendencies with the Europeans: an estimated one-third of their total number returned to the homeland after a longer or shorter stay in Latin America.

Problem number two is the ratio of Arabic and non-Arabic ethnicities among the emigrants of the Ottoman Empire. Opinion prevails that the majority of ottoman subjects emigrating to North- and South-America came from Syria and Lebanon, were Arabs in respect of ethnicity and Christians (orthodox or Maronite) in respect of religion. But according to Kemal H. Karpat the ratio of non-Arabs (e.g.Armenians) and Muslims from various nations was much higher among the emigrants than presumed. Karpat states that between 1881–1914 the total number of Ottoman emigration to America reached 1,2 million with at least 600 000 Arabic-speaking individuals from Syria and Mount Leban among them. An estimated 100 000 Armenians and at least 250 000 ethnically mixed Muslims should be reckoned with. The emigrants of the Balkan and Western-Anatolia give the rest. If we presume that roughly one third of the total number

7 MÖRNER, op.cit., 40 (Map 2)

of the emigrants returned home after a while then cc. 400–500 000 "Syrian" emigrants were still left in the Americas at the beginning of World War I.⁸

U.S.A. statistics have kept a record of immigrants from the empire of Turkey since 1869. According to 1910 data 59 702 individuals from the foreign-born population originated from the Asian region of the empire. The 1920 statistics break down the data to countries: 3202 persons came from Palestine and 51 900 from Syria⁹. So if we take a rough estimation of 55–60 000 Syrian-Lebanese emigrants living in the U.S.A. then using Karpát's data we end up with cc. 350–440 000 Arabs settling down in Latin America until World War I.

The beginnings of Arabic emigration to America date back to 1861. The process grew to considerable proportions first at the end of the seventies, in 1878–79, then in 1884–85 it gained momentum and expanded. The increase is unbroken and continuous from the nineties to World War I., immigration reached a final peak in the period from 1908 to 1912.

The Arabic immigrants (just like the Italian, the Spanish or other nations) were attracted by the dynamically developing Latin-American countries, Argentina and Brazil in the first place. Estimations state that in Brazil in 1901 the Syrian-Lebanese community consisted already of 60 000 persons¹⁰. In Argentina between 1871–1880 the "Turks" gave 0,26% of the immigrants, between 1881–1890. the ratio was 0,42%, between 1891–1900., 1,79%; between 1901–1910, 3,78%; between 1911–1920, 4,87%¹¹. This means that between 1880–1914 at least 1500 – 2000 newcomer Arabic immigrants settled down in Argentina in each year. In the peak period of immigration numbers increase by leaps and bounds. Between 1910–1912, in a period of mere three years, 46 000 "Turks" arrived at the country¹².

Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Santos, the Brazilian coffee-port were the chief receiving harbours of "Turkish" immigrants in South-America. Until 1891 the Barcelona – Habana direction counted among the popular emigration routes as well. But in 1891 Spanish authorities forbade Arabic immigration to the Isle (and to the Philippines) so Arabic emigration starting from Barcelona turned towards the U.S.A. Further Arabic immigrants were received into Cuba only in the 20ieth century, after the island gained independence.

Until World War I. Syrian-Lebanese emigration was basically motivated by economic reasons but difficult and delicate religious affairs and religious quarrels of the

8 KARPAT, Kemal H., "The „Syrian“ Emigration from the Ottoman State, 1870–1914" In: *Les provinces arabes et leurs documentaires à l'époque ottomane. Actes du 5^{ème} Symposium du Comité International d'Etudes Pre-Ottomanes et Ottomanes* (Tunis, 1984), 294

9 See e.g. MORISON, S.E. – COMMAGER, H.S., *The Growth of the American Republic* (Oxford UP, New York, 1962), Vol. II., 1017

10 KARPAT, op.cit., 293

11 SÁNCHEZ-ALBORNOZ, Nicolás, *La población de América latina* (Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1977), 174

12 KARPAT, op.cit., 293

Middle East also had their share in it¹³. After the turn of the century when the presence of intellectuals among the Arabic immigrants in America became noticeable, political motivation, too, made its debut: protest against the Turkish rule was expressed in some papers of the emigrants. But until World War I. the decisive motives are to be found in the sphere of economy. The European demand for foodproducts, the expanding possibilities of exportation resulted in an agricultural boom in Syria and Lebanon in the second half of the 19th century inducing a minor agrarian revolution. Each patch of arable soil was subjected to cultivation; in the agricultural communities of the villages the struggle for land and for irrigation water intensified and often took on a religious tinge. A process of inner migration started as well. The economical possibilities attracted a considerable number of immigrants from other provinces, meanwhile a part of the original settlers were driven out from agriculture and tried to find a living in the rapidly developing harbour towns. A relative overpopulation of the harbour towns quickly ensued and this together with the existential uncertainty made up the actual starting-point of Arabic emigration to America.

Traditional communities disintegrated, bonds broke up, existential uncertainty and impoverishment threatened on one pole. The promised land of America, tempting possibilities in Argentina, Brazil and the U.S.A. lured on the other side. From the seventies onwards, in the cities of Europe (e.g. Liverpool, Genoa, Barcelona,) immigration agencies and shipping companies sent their Middle-Eastern agents to talk customers into the deal. For the most part these companies acted on behalf of private persons or private enterprises but sometimes even governments commissioned them to recruit immigrants.

Those choosing the great adventure to cross the ocean had to face a lot of difficulties. As a matter of fact, Syrian-Lebanese emigration was basically individual in character. No certain jobs waited for the immigrants in America, they had no contracts. Exceptions occured of course every now and then. Kemal H. Karpat mentions the name of Paulo Duval, a Brazilian landowner who wanted to recruit workers for his coffee-plantations with the assistance of the Ottoman authorities in 1908, because his earlier experiences with Armenian employees had been favourable¹⁴. Obtaining a passport (as mentioned above) raised heavyweight difficulties. Raising money for the costs meant similar problems. Arab emigrants usually had to turn all their belongings into cash and even borrow money to cover the costs of crossing and to have some reserve for a new start in the New World. The family, the relatives could sometimes help. The standard fee of crossing was 160 French francs but the agents often cheated their clients and wheedled more out of them.

The overwhelming majority of the Arab immigrants – contrary to the East-European immigrants or to the majority of the Italian immigrants – found jobs in Latin-America

13 FAOUR, Ali, "Les consequences sociales de l'emigration au Liban", *Cahiers de la Mediterranee*, No.44 (Juin 1992), 228

14 KARPAT, op.cit., 288

out of the agriculture. The big dream of the majority of European immigrants was to own land. Among the first generation of Arabs only those shared this dream who grew rich and considered the estate to be important to express their new social status in society. The majority of the "Turks" found living in the most dynamically growing branches of economy, in commerce, in the catering trade, in urban small-scale industry and in the new branches of industry moving in and expanding in Latin-America. These branches of economy were unknown for most of them in their homelands. This mobility caught the attention of Seymour Martin Lipset e.g. who states that the major part of Latin-American business elites comes from the representatives of smaller ethnicities (e.g. Jews, Arabs, Germans). Such immigrant groups (e.g. Italians, Arabs) played important roles in introducing new branches of industry and new enterprises which in the 19th century in the old home were not particularly well-known about their entrepreneur zeal¹⁵.

The overwhelming majority of the "Turks" of Latin-America became town-dwellers. A sizeable Arabic colony developed e.g. in Buenos Aires where Syrians concentrated in the district northward from Plaza de Mayo¹⁶. In Brazil, São Paulo, Santos, Rio de Janeiro attracted most the Arab immigrants but they also appeared in Amado's Bahia and in the small towns of Rio Grande do Sul. In São Paulo the Mercado-district became the centre of the Arabic domicile¹⁷. A considerable Lebanese colony developed in Montevideo as well. The "Turks" there excelled themselves in the textile-trade¹⁸. Though the immigrants (Arabs, Italians, Spanish and others as well) tended to concentrate in certain districts of towns, yet in the big cities of Latin-America no U.S.A.-like immigrant ghettos came into being.

The typical Arab career in Latin America started with travelling trade. The trader lugged along his meagre stock consisting of threads, needles, cheap textiles, household goods in a trunk on donkeyback and travelled from town to town, from plantation to plantation visiting places in the back of beyond. The figure of travelling trader often emerges in the works of 20th century Latin-American literature. In Traven's novel *The Barrow* (Der Karren) the Arab tradesman from Tabasco sells cheap Yucatan silk as French silk because he has already learned how to cheat Mexican small-town folks with his broken Spanish and his big voice¹⁹. Jorge Amado's tradesman sells brightly-coloured scarves, fake rings and necklaces, miraculous icons. His miserable stuff is the sole luxury of the plantation workers, of the people of the huts²⁰.

15 LIPSET, Seymour Martin, "Values, Education, and Entrepreneurship" In: *Elites in Latin America* (Oxford UP., New York, 1967), 24

16 SCOBIE, James R., *Argentina. A City and a Nation* (Oxford UP., London, 1971), 192

17 NEIF NABHAN, Neuza, "O imigrante árabe em São Paulo." *Leitura*; No. 9/107 (São Paulo, abril de 1991), 17-18

18 PENDLE, George, *Uruguay* (Oxford UP., London, 1965), 5

19 TRAVEN, B., *A taliga / Der Karren* (Kossuth, Budapest, 1974), 225

20 AMADO, Jorge, *Arany gyümölcsök földje* (Európa, Budapest, 1975), 23-24

The next station of the career was to open a shop of his own in some town. In case of business success the tradesman could pay his debts and he could even bring in his brothers, his relatives from the old homeland. He developed his shop into a family enterprise. Their fancy stores are also immortalized by Latin American literature. Syrian traders have made a great impact especially on the world and imagination of Gabriel García Márquez. The "street of the Turks" with Syrian Moisés and his associates lounging before the shop and offering their goods is present in most of his major novels and short stories, Macondo, the darling town of his imagination included²¹.

In the next phase the successful tradesman developed into an entrepreneur. He switched to wholesale trade, purchased warehouses, obtained interests in the catering trade, bought hotels. Successful tradesman and entrepreneurs had their children educated, sent them to boarding schools and universities. Between the two World Wars, and after 1945, the representatives of the second generation acted not only on the business scenery but appeared in politics as well. Neuzá Neif Nabhan describes a career like this²². His hero is *Salim*, the pater familias of a family which unites four generations in our day. He arrived at Santos via Genoa on board of an Italian ship at the end of the last century. From here he moved to São Paulo and started his Brazilian career as a small trader. At the outset his wife helped him in the shop whom he had got acquainted with in the local Arabic colony. Later his brothers emigrated to Brazil, too, and joined the business. Salim already could have his seven children educated. Appropriate to business interests the eldest was trained to be a bookkeeper but the family produced a doctor and a teacher as well. The grandchildren entered politics, one of them became a high-rank administrator of the state of São Paulo. In literature Amado's hero, Syrian *Nacib* is the embodiment of this ambitious type. Nacib's father used to sell cloth in a small shop. But Nacib himself got fed up with selling cloth, bought a bar from his inheritance, at the end of the novel he owns also a restaurant and he is dreaming of buying soon a cocoa plantation²³. A similar family history unfolds in the novel "The Chronicle of an Announced Murder" (*Crônica de uma muerte anunciada*) by García Márquez. The hero *Santiago Nasar* is of Syrian origin²⁴.

The Arabic tradesmen appeared in almost every Latin-American country and they were mostly successful even in those regions (e.g. in Mexico, in Central America, in Colombia) where immigration played otherwise minor role until World War I. Around 1898 a small group of the subjects of the Ottoman Empire settled down in the Republic

21 See: GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, Gabriel: *Száz év magány* /Cien años de soledad/ (Magvető, Budapest, 1971), 298; *Macondóban hull az eső* (Európa, Budapest, 1992 – short stories), e.g. 229–230; etc.

22 NEIF NABHAN, op.cit.

23 AMADO, Gabriela, 44–45, and further.

24 GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, *Egy előre bejelentett gyilkosság krónikája* /Crónica de una muerte anunciada/ (Magvető, Budapest, 1982)

of Dominica²⁵. Their success is indicated by the fact that in the thirties Arabic investments held eighth place among all foreign investments of the country²⁶. The small Arab groups immigrating into the Central American republics first found jobs in coffee production and other agricultural branches, but quite soon they began to trade and became the salesmen of big foreign companies²⁷.

The history of the Haiti Arab colony is particularly interesting. In the last decade of the 19th century Syrian-Lebanese traders settled there. As to their numbers, estimations range from a couple of hundreds up to 15 000. According to B. Gayle Plummer the Syrian-Lebanese community was the most numerous in 1903 with its 6000 numbers. This is a very big number if we take it into consideration that the overall number of foreigners living in the black republic did not exceed 10 000²⁸. In a couple of years the Arabs got the monopoly of small trade and drove Haiti traders off the business. By the early 20ieth century the most prosperous traders played a role in wholesale export-import trade as well. They started their wholesale activity usually as the agents of American, French and British companies but in a short time they challenged the Martinique- and Guadeloupe-resident French companies as serious rivals. In their frequent conflicts with the Haiti government and the local tradesmen they were aided by the embassies of Great-Britain, France and especially of the U.S.A. several times²⁹. From the beginnings of the 20ieth century they influenced Haiti politics with money, and in 1912 they participated in a plot against the president of the country. After the American occupation of Haiti (1915) the "Syrians" supported American politics³⁰. Their activities and behaviour induced such widespread resistance and aversion that in the early years of the 20ieth century a newspaper bearing the title "*L'Antisyrien*" was published for some time³¹.

Adaptation to the local societies was made easier for the first generation of Arabs immigrating to Latin America by a certain amount of familiarity in the receiving culture. Elements of Arabic culture appeared in Latin America sooner than the Arabs themselves since in the colonial period the Spanish and Portuguese transplanted many of its iberized characteristics to the New World. It is also very important that until World War I. xenophoby did not play a major role in Latin American societies. At the beginning of the 20ieth century in certain countries (e.g. Argentina) laws were enacted

25 *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge UP., Cambridge, etc., 1986), vol. V.,293. Further: *Cambridge*.

26 FRANCO,Franclin J., *República Dominicana. Clases, crisis y comandos* (Casa de las Américas, La Habana, 1966), 45

27 *Cambridge*,vol. V.,216

28 PLUMMER, Brenda G., „The Metropolitan Connection:Foreign and Semiforeign Elites in Haiti, 1900–1915.” *Latin American Research Review*, 1984/2, 125

29 *Ibid.*,132

30 CASTOR,Suzy, *La ocupación norteamericana de Haiti y sus consecuencias, 1915–1934* (Casa de las Américas, La Habana, 1978), 19,23,43

31 *Cambridge*, vol. V., 317

to control and restrict the activities of foreigners but these laws were not directed particularly against the Arabs. Until World War I. Latin American states did not even lay stress on the immigrants acquiring citizenship. Conflicts between immigrants and locals were triggered off in most cases by the economic success of the former as it is demonstrated by the Haiti case mentioned above. Similar motivation started the 1919 Buenos Aires pogrom as well in which the victims were Jewish traders almost exclusively (cc. 10 persons were injured)³².

Adaptation, protection of interests and preservation of identity was evenly served by the societies, mutual aid associations, schools, papers etc. of the immigrants. Orthodox Christian Arabs in São Paulo as early as 1897 secured a chamber for divine service and later they built a church of their own. Simultaneously they founded the Orthodox Society (*Sociedad Ortodoxa*) which gave a framework to religious life and organized the social life of the community as well. Also in 1879 in São Paulo the *Syrian – French School* was founded and a year later the so-called *Chediak School* as well. The *Sociedade Beneficente Siria* in the town of Franca and the *Sociedade Maronita de Beneficência* in São Paulo counted among the mutualist associations³³.

Similar societies were established all over Latin America. But e.g. in Cuba the self-organizing process is lagging behind that of Brazil. In Cuba the first Arabian society, the *Sociedad Progreso Sirio* was set up in 1918. *Sociedad Palestina* followed in 1919, *Sociedad Libanesa de La Habana* in 1920, the latter being the most powerful Arab society in Cuba (since 90% of the Arabs living in Cuba came from Lebanon). Between the two World Wars Arab societies were established in several big cities of the country as well, e.g. in Santiago de Cuba, in Santa Clara, in Manzanillo and in Ciego de Ávila which was one of the most important centres of the Arabs living in Cuba³⁴.

The first generation of the immigrants held two languages and two souls. The different languages separated yet two different worlds. Spanish or Portuguese was used on the street, in business life, in short: in public. Arabic stayed the language of the family, of the wider ethnic community. This situation is reflected in the early newspapers of the emigration: some of them were Arabic, others bilingual, using Arabic and the language of the receiving country. At the end of the 19th century in Brazil not less than seven Arabic papers were published in the state of São Paulo alone³⁵. In Argentina the Buenos Aires Arab community ran two newspapers³⁶.

The so-called "Turks" were assimilated with relative facility. This is partly due to the fact that they were similar to the southern Europeans who gave the majority of immigrants not only in their skin colour but in their mentality as well. It was also important that the majority was Christian (Maronite or Orthodox) so they adapted

32 MÖRNER, op.cit., 75

33 NEIF NABHAN, op.cit., 18

34 *Sociedades arabes de Cuba*. Apuntes históricos (La Habana, 1988), /brochure/.

35 NEIF NABHAN, op.cit., 18

36 KARPAT, op.cit. 297

themselves easily to the basically Catholic societies of the receiving countries. A considerable number of them quickly Spaniardized their names, e.g. by translating it to Spanish. Others obtained Spanish names through the customs officers or the civil servants processing naturalization who did not understand or misunderstood the Arabic names, so transcribed them according to their own fantasy. The name-changing process was quite extensive. Its scope can be demonstrated by the fact that after World War II. in certain countries the Arabic communities published indexes which listed Arabs with Spanish names as well. On the one hand this served saving the self-identity of Syrian-Lebanese communities, on the other, it was a guide for enterpreneurs from the Middle East who were looking for business contacts with Syrian-Lebanese traders of Latin America. This happened e.g. in Mexico where in 1948 the Syrian-Lebanese community conducted a detailed self-survey³⁷.

In the beginning the immigrants married almost exclusively within the Arabic community or they brought brides from the Middle East. After World War I. this exclusiveness gradually loosened, the process running parallel with the integration into the society of the receiving country. According to Sánchez-Albornoz between 1934-39 already 54% of men of Syrian descent living in São Paulo married Brazilian women. Similarly to other immigrant ethnicities, women tended rather to stay within their own ethnic group, more than 80% married Arabs. Social prejudices or the more conservative upbringing of Arabic women were responsible for this only to a certain extent. The main reason is that the male members of the Arabic community still preferred to choose their spouse within their own ethnic group if possible. Yet on the whole the Syrian community was far more open than the Far-Eastern or Middle-European (Hungarians included). For example, in the given period only 18,9% of Hungarian immigrant males marrying in São Paulo chose Brazilian spouses, all the others insisted on having Hungarian brides. Among Hungarian females the rate of inter-marriage with Brazilians was even lower, a mere 11,1%³⁸.

In the life of the second and third generation the process of integrating into the society of the new homeland accelerated considerably in spite of the renewing waves of immigrants joining the pioneers between the two World Wars and after 1945. This continuous immigration process has resulted in a sizeable Arabic community in Latin America by our time. Accurate figures are not to be found. But the *Cultural Union of the Lebanese of the World* (*Union Culturelle Libanaise dans le Monde*) in the mid-seventies estimated the total number of Lebanese immigrants and their offspring 2 million in Brazil, 400 000 in Argentina and 78 000 in Mexico³⁹. Multitudinousness, double identity with attachment to the old homeland and to Latin America as well, and the vivid diplomatic activities of the newly-independent Arabic countries triggered the process when the local unions and societies organized themselves into national

37 MÖRNER, op.cit.,73

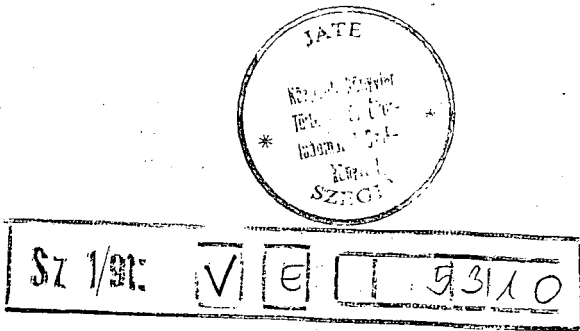
38 SÁNCHEZ-ALBORNOZ,op.cit.,177

39 Quoted by FAOUR,op.cit. 242,note 27

associations in the 1970-ies. In our day twenty countries have their national-level associations which unite altogether 1,5 million Arabs in North- and South-America according to their own estimation. Argentina was the first country where a national-level association of the Arabs was established in 1972 (*Federación de Entidades Arabes en Argentina*). This association took the initiative in organizing the first Pan-American Congress of the Arabs which whereupon set up the continental organization uniting the national associations in 1973 in Buenos Aires (*FEARAB-AMÉRICA*)⁴⁰.

In spite of the efforts to save and keep double identity the attachment to the old homeland is gradually losing strength. E.g. in Cuba (and in other countries as well) the associations of Arabs organize language courses in order to teach basic Arabic to the members of the community to help them to keep their Arab identity this way.

The integration of "small emigrations" into Latin American societies is indicated by the assimilation process or by the fact that in the 1990ies the first men of tree countries have come from their ranks. Peruvian president Fujimori has Japanese ancestors, Paraguay president Wazmossy has some Hungarian blood in his veins and the president of Argentina, Carlos Menem is of Arabic descent.



⁴⁰ AYÚS GARCÍA, Juan, "Congreso Panamericano Árabe" *El Árabe*, No.31(1988), 2-3 ; FEARAB AMERICA /brochure/.